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Ce serait le moment de philosopher et de
rechercher si, par hasard, se trouverait ici
l'endroit où de telles paroles dégèlent.

Rabelais, *Le Quart Livre*

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The Abject: Kristeva and the *Antigone*

Clifford Davis

Julia Kristeva's theory of the abject provides an illuminating and interrogative hermeneutic technique for Sophocles' *Antigone*. Kristeva has demonstrated the applicability of this theory to the Theban saga (although, perhaps, with mixed results) in her reading of Sophocles's *Oedipus Tyrannos* and *Oedipus at Colonus* (*Powers of Horror* 83-89). Her interpretation of *Oedipus Tyrannos* not only reinforces Lacanian psychoanalytical theory, but also situates the concept of the abject, as an extension of Lacan, within the ancient text as the *agos*, "defilement" of Oedipus. Kristeva argues that the new king, as *agos*, represents the source of the abject and embodies its purification as *pharmakos*: "scapegoat." The structural and thematic oppositions in the *Antigone* between patriarchal, institutional uniformity in the *polis* and the more antiquated, chthonic obligations of the heterogeneous dead mark this drama, too, as extraordinarily well-suited for reinterpretation as a confrontation between an archaic, Greek Symbolic and the abject. In this paper, I use Kristevan theory to elucidate and reinterpret the primary oppositions in Sophocles's *Antigone* and demonstrate how such a reading differs from the structuralist interpretations of C.W. Oudemans and J.P. Vernant. Instead of reducing the antagonism of Antigone and Creon to a Hegelian or structuralist reading of binary opposition between equally legitimate claims, I demonstrate that the conflicts in the *Antigone* reflect the psychological tension between nascent patriarchal institutions and the excluded, but sanctified, feminine Other. First, however, it is necessary to present the main tenets of Kristeva's theory of the abject.

I. Lacan and Kristeva

Julia Kristeva's work is deeply indebted to Jacques Lacan and his reinterpretation of Freudian principles in terms of post-structuralist discourse theory (Lacan, *Ecrits*; *Télévision*). Lacan's theory of the symbolic order (or Symbolic) describes the indoctrination of the child into the phallogocentric system of cultural institutions. The Symbolic is a monolithic, unitary system that pervades language and, therefore, all cultural institutions because they are conceived

through language. The Symbolic is dominated by "the Law" (an idea appropriated by Lacan from Claude Levi-Strauss) which the father embodies for the child: a social taboo on incestuous relations with the mother.¹ At the same time that a child begins to acquire language, he/she² recognizes the Law and represses the "guilty desire" of incest. This repression of the incestuous desire becomes the unconscious. Before the acquisition of language when the child is prelinguistic and precultural, it expresses itself in a pre-oedipal, heterogeneous register Lacan calls the "imaginary," when the child cannot distinguish between the "self" and the world. Until indoctrination into the Symbolic by language, there is no clear distinction between the subject and the "object of desire." The child has no totalizable "I" (i.e., no ego). In this state of the "imaginary,"³ its relationship with the mother is symbiotic; the child is unable to differentiate between its own identity and hers. Nevertheless, symbiosis is hardly idyllic, since the child may entertain aggressive and destructive fantasies about the mother (Klein 344-369). When the child acquires language and recognizes the Law, his intimate connection with the mother is sundered and he develops an ego. Thus, the object of desire, and all that the ego acts upon, (the effects of the ego), are no longer perceived as an internal part of the child's being; they become external and oppositional to the "self."⁴

In *The Revolution of Poetic Language*, Kristeva articulates her theory that the "semiotic" is a revolutionary force. As a hidden vestige of the pre-oedipal, pre-thetic⁵ experience within language, the semiotic is inextricably associated with the maternal body and becomes an antagonistic, excluded, linguistic Other. It exists not only in diachronic precedence to the Symbolic, but also opposes it synchronically from its excluded position in language. Kristeva views the difference between the imaginary and the symbolic order as a gender opposition in language in a way that Lacan does not. She imagines the rhythms of the semiotic as a "genotextual" alterity that undermines the modality of the Symbolic.⁶ Therefore, the semiotic subverts the Law of the Father. Since Kristeva proposes that this "other language" is opposed to the rigid significations of institutional, patriarchal language (God, state, father, etc.), the semiotic becomes revolutionary. Accordingly, Kristeva's language is often reminiscent of an insurgent political discourse.⁷

II. *Theory of the Abject*

Kristeva identifies the monolithic, patriarchal Symbolic with all cultural institutions. Because institutions are conceived through language, which reflects patriarchal dogma, language and culture preclude the acknowledgement of maternal drives (*pulsions*). The maternal represents the prelinguistic and precultural state called the "imaginary" by Lacan. Again, this is the register of the child, the *infant* who has not yet acquired speech (Eagleton 188). These maternal drives are associated with a non-totalizable, heterogeneous experience. They involve gender ambiguity, submission to the maternal, and unfettered expression of incestuous feelings for the mother. It should be noted here that Kristeva's translation of the imaginary into a register of the maternal drives (or "the feminine") excluded by the Symbolic involves a rather significant modification of Lacanian theory. Kristeva introduces the idea that the child's indoctrination by a repressive, patriarchal system requires a rejection of the "feminine" object: the maternal. Unlike Lacan, Kristeva now focuses almost entirely on the ominous consequences of the subjugation and exclusion of the maternal drives.

In *Powers of Horror* (1-5), Kristeva theorizes that the unhealthy symptom of the Symbolic's hegemony is the superego/object relationship, in which the patriarchal is canonized and maternal drives are transformed and repressed. Before the development of the superego, the ego/object relationship is less exclusionary. Since Kristeva proposes that the object represents the maternal drives, she seems to imply that at the preliminary stage of the child's development of identity, there is still the possibility of a mutual recognition of the ego and the feminine object. As the child transcends the imaginary, his first recognized "object" is the maternal body. The impending tyranny of the superego institutionalized by the Symbolic, however, represses and banishes the maternal object. Institutional language becomes a surrogate parent when the maternal is excluded (*Powers* 45). This exclusion seems to result from a kind of hypertrophy of the active subject when it is glutted by a restricted diet of phallogocentric, institutional doctrine. The ego becomes so "hyperinflated" by the "paternal" Symbolic that the object is first obscured, and then "flatly driven away" (2). Thus, the object is transmuted into the *abject*, which threatens and challenges the Symbolic from its banished, hidden position. As a result, the

excluded object, the *abject*, becomes frightening and subversive. As Kristeva states:

The abject has only one quality of the object—that of being opposed to *I*. If the object, however, through its opposition, settles me within the fragile texture of a desire for meaning, which, as a matter of fact, makes me ceaselessly and infinitely homologous to it, what is abject, on the contrary, the jettisoned object, is radically excluded and draws me toward the place where meaning collapses. A certain “ego” that merged with its master, a superego, has flatly driven it away. It lies outside, beyond the set, and does not seem to agree to the rules of the game. And yet, from its place of banishment, the abject does not cease challenging its master. Without a sign (for him), it beseeches a discharge, a convulsion, a crying out. To each ego its object, to each superego its abject. (*Powers* 1-2)

The abject represents the excluded and repugnant effects⁸ of the superego: physical effluences, decay, and death. Therefore, as the etymology suggests, the abject represents what is “thrown out” by the Symbolic. It could be seen as a rather horrifying intensification or transmutation of the Freudian concept of the death instinct (Freud 46-49; 58-69). Significantly, it is the very act of exclusion by the superego that transforms the maternal object into the subversive, horrifying abject (*Powers* 2-4). In this way, the maternal is associated with what is now regarded by the superego as “unclean and improper”:

Loathing an item of food, a piece of filth, waste, or dung. The spasms and vomiting that protect me. The repugnance, the retching that thrusts me to the side and turns me away from defilement, sewage, and muck. The shame of compromise, of being in the middle of treachery. The fascinated start that leads me toward and separates me from them. (*Powers* 2)

In other words, the abject represents the waste that the superego casts off in order to live. If the abject signifies the detritus of the superego, the inveterate repression of the object finds its culmination in a discarded corpse: the physical embodiment of the jettisoned object. Therefore, death is associated with the maternal:

... refuse and corpses show me what I permanently thrust aside in order to live. These body fluids, this defilement, this

shit are what life withstands, hardly and with difficulty, on the part of death. (*Powers* 3)

Since the superego cannot completely avoid its own effects, it is always impure, unclear, and unhealthy. Moreover, despite its attempt to exclude the abject, it is constantly reminded of the imminence of death. This desperate attempt to exclude the Other, which nevertheless contaminates from the borders of the superego, leads to the abjection of self. Kristeva graphically illustrates the constant turmoil of self-abjection:

I expel *myself*, I spit *myself* out, I abject *myself* within the same motion through which "I" claim to establish myself. That detail, perhaps an insignificant one, but one that they ferret out, emphasize, evaluate, that trifle turns me inside out, guts sprawling; it is thus that *they* see that "I" am in the process of becoming an other at the expense of my own death. (*Powers* 3)

Kristeva argues that the abject is a revolutionary force which constantly threatens the superego and advocates a "purification"⁹ of the abject on the only fronts where it can be recognized, the artistic and the semiotic. These are the registers in which an epiphany of the maternal drives is possible, compelling us to confront and acknowledge the maternal. The purifying recognition of the maternal, or *jouissance*, is a sexually painful, nostalgic acknowledgement of the maternal achieved through the semiotic. Since *jouissance* involves a recognition of the maternal, it allows the purification of the abject. It is evoked by the semiotic through certain kinds of polyphonous, defamiliarizing language in which the subject/object opposition is subverted, collapsed, and assimilated. According to Kristeva, when we read innovative, defamiliarizing language, we gain access to the hidden forces of the semiotic. She argues that the highly unorthodox, defamiliarizing use of language by Modernistic writers, (specifically James Joyce and Virginia Woolf) and the French Symbolist poets, causes an evocation of maternal drives and, therefore, forces a confrontation with the abject. She describes the "semiotic plasticity," the heterogeneity of Joyce's language as:

How dazzling, unending, eternal—and so weak, so insignificant, so sickly—is the rhetoric of Joycean language. Far from

preserving us from the abject, Joyce causes it to break out.
(*Powers* 22)

The collapse of the subject/object opposition in language recalls the heterogeneous and polyphonous experience of the infant.¹⁰ This compels us to confront and acknowledge the excluded maternal drives. As a result, we experience *jouissance* and the abject is purified. In other words, when we are forced to recognize the maternal, the superego's hegemony is usurped. In this way, we transcend the destructive superego/abject opposition and achieve a psychological balance; we "return" to the ego/object.

III. Kristeva's Interpretation of Sophocles's *Oedipus Tyrannos*

Before we turn to *Antigone*, it is useful to examine briefly Kristeva's interpretation of the *Oedipus Tyrannos* as a confrontation with and purification of the abject. First, we must establish the connection between myth and the semiotic. Although she does not state it directly, Kristeva apparently views myth as a kind of monolithic discourse that opposes the state-sponsored, institutional language of fifth-century B.C.E. Athens.¹¹ Froma Zeitlin's examination (101-141) of Thebes as the *topos* of "otherness" in Athenian drama helps to clarify and evaluate this notion. She argues that the Theban plays serve as a dramatic Other through which the most horrifying and insoluble conflicts (incest, parricide, etc.) are confronted by the Athenian audience, but are displaced, safely, in the penumbral scenes of Thebes and Argos (102-3; 116-123). While Zeitlin's argument is fascinating and sensible, Kristeva seems to suggest that myths are not only dramatically Other, but also evince linguistic defamiliarization. Like the innovative language of Joyce or Baudelaire, myth should be equated with the semiotic, a hidden force that challenges the Symbolic even as it is displaced or rejected. There are a few problems with this argument. First, we must ask ourselves, are myths not conveyed only *through language*? Second, despite the psychological atmosphere of "otherness" in the Theban myths described by Zeitlin, there may not be anything patently "defamiliarizing" about the language of Greek drama *per se*. Even if there were defamiliarizing elements in the texts, it would be exceedingly difficult for a modern scholar to recognize them without access to the entire corpus of ancient texts and secure knowledge of everyday speech in the fifth century

B.C.E. In any event, Kristeva views myth as a semiotic discourse that counteracts the institutional language of the Greek *polis*.

Kristeva interprets *Oedipus Tyrannos* as a confrontation with and purification of the abject. She says that Oedipus's "tragic . . . fate sums up and displaces the mythical defilement [abject] that situates impurity on the untouchable 'other side'" (Powers 83). In the play, Oedipus is unaware that the object of desire is his mother, Jocasta. According to Kristeva, Oedipus's attempt to find the truth reveals his own intimate connection with incest and death, his abjection. In order to protect Thebes, (the archaic Symbolic), from defilement, Oedipus blinds and exiles himself. Kristeva interprets the act of blinding as Oedipus's attempt to displace the objects of his desire, Jocasta, the wife/mother, and his children. This displacement transforms the object into the abject. The king's recognition of his self-abjection then compels him to exclude the defilement from Thebes by exiling himself.

Specifically, Kristeva views *Oedipus Tyrannos* in the following way: Oedipus transforms himself into an object of defilement, an *agos*, in order to purify the city, which has become contaminated by his *miasma*, or "pollution" (Powers 84). Kristeva's conception of *miasma* is similar to that of J.P. Vernant, who views *miasma* as the result of a structurally oppositional tension between the internal, individuated *ethos* of the protagonist and the external *daimôn* (Vernant 35-6). His discussion of the psychological dimension of *atê* ("reckless folly") and *miasma* is not only illuminating, but also bears striking parallels to Kristeva's theory of the abject. Defiled, as an abject figure, Oedipus suffers from the ambiguity of his roles.¹² Kristeva places great importance on the significance of ambiguity in the play:

The mainspring of the tragedy lies in that ambiguity; prohibition and ideal are joined in a single character in order to signify that the speaking being has no space of his own but stands on a fragile threshold as if stranded on account of an impossible demarcation. (Powers 82-3)¹³

The act of incest represents a transgression of the Symbolic's boundaries. Oedipus's *peripeteia*, "reversal of fortune," transforms him into a being of abjection and a *pharmakos*, "scapegoat." Rene Girard's analysis of the role of the *pharmakos* in Greek tragedy is instructive here. He asserts that the community defers wholesale

violence by objectifying collective guilt in the *pharmakos*, and then exterminating him (Girard 121-4). Therefore, Oedipus's role as the *pharmakos* provides the city with a means by which it can objectify and exclude the defilement, the abject. But, by recognizing his incestuous and intimate connection with the maternal, Jocasta, Oedipus purifies the abject. Kristeva goes on to analyze the *Oedipus at Colonus* as further evidence of the purification of the abject (Powers 86-9). Her arguments about "the complete otherness" of Oedipus in OC and the relationship between the abject and law are abstruse and problematic. For the sake of brevity, I do not discuss her analysis of the OC in this paper.

IV. *Antigone*

Rather than extrapolating a Kristevan reading of the *Antigone*, the following interpretation is intended to illuminate the primary oppositions in the Greek text by means of her theory.¹⁴ Although my interpretation proposes a loosely oppositional structure in the play, this does not mean that I view the antagonism of Antigone and Creon as a Hegelian antithesis between two equally legitimate claims. In contrast, C.W. Oudemans, the structuralist critic, envisions the *Antigone* as a rigidly Hegelian structure of "interconnected cosmology" between celestial and chthonic divinities (118-203; 237-48). Oudemans also interprets the conflict between Antigone and Creon as oppositional, but mutually valid. One of the problems with Hegelian analyses of this play is that its *dénouement* must somehow be recast, paradoxically, as a salutary, but "negative resolution." Based on the text alone, it is difficult to see anything auspicious in the resolution of the *Antigone*. There is sufficient textual evidence that Sophocles intended for Antigone to be seen not only as more heroic than Creon, but more righteous. Therefore, I attempt to distinguish my Kristevan reading of the play from the structuralist interpretations of Oudemans and Vernant. I also adapt Kristeva's ideas a bit when I feel the modification adds insight to the *Antigone*.¹⁵

Since the *Antigone* is a depiction of the tensions between the authority of the more antiquated chthonic gods and the celestial divinities of the nascent polis, we can employ Kristeva's theory to interpret the chthonic as the prehistoric maternal and the Olympians as the patrons of the new institutions of a Greek Symbolic. In this view, the child's transition from the pre-oedipal phase to

indoctrination by the Symbolic represents not only a historical development from the precultural "infancy" of civilization to the dominance of the *polis*, but also, simultaneously, a political phenomenon in Sophoclean Athens. The child's intimate connection with the mother's body parallels the mythological association of the older chthonic gods, such as Hades and Persephone, and the pre-olympian monsters, such as the Titans and the Erinyes, with the earth-mother goddess, Gaia.¹⁶ Sophocles's description in the Ode on Man (338) of the subjugation of the earth by civic man introduces the new hegemony of the Symbolic over the maternal. As Charles Segal has pointed out (46-66), this chorus describes the potential for repression and bondage through human ingenuity. The mastery of natural, bestial forces described throughout this chorus parallels the superego's subjugation of the primitive pre-oedipal phase. In my extension of Kristeva's theory, the association of the chthonic deities with death, burial, and blood becomes particularly suggestive. This connection symbolizes the exclusion of the maternal drives and their horrifying transformation into the abject. Therefore, in the *Antigone*, the chthonic represents the Other: the wild forces, decay, and death that are banished beyond the city walls, but threaten to penetrate and contaminate the *polis*. And, if we accept Benveniste's speculations that Greek kinship was based on the matrilineal blood tie (subsumed later by the patrilineal phratry), a matrilineal origin suggests the "precultural" dominance of the maternal.¹⁷ These oppositions between the maternal and the Symbolic in *Antigone* are represented by the conflict between Antigone and Creon.

The legacy of the incest of Oedipus and Jocasta is inherited by Antigone and marks her abjection. Like Oedipus, Antigone is an ambiguous being who defies categorization and, therefore, subverts the Symbolic. She is both male and female, a savior and an *agos*, a *parthenos* ("virgin") and a bride. Her heterogeneity of roles, her polyphony, parallels the pre-oedipal diffusion of the maternal. Her devotion to Polyneices is maternal; when she finds his body laid bare, she cries out like a mother bird who has discovered an empty nest (423-425). Antigone's intimate connection with his corpse and chthonic obligations of burial emphasize her abjection. In fact, Antigone's frequent references to her love for Polyneices, e.g., "loved shall I lie with him, beloved with beloved" (73, et al.), resonate with incestuous desire: the erotic relationship between the

maternal and the child condemned by the Symbolic's Law. Like Kristeva's maternal, Antigone's relationship with her family is symbiotic. In recognition of the authority of precultural, ineffable divinities, anterior to the polis, she cannot separate her brothers based on their allegiance to the city.

Creon, on the other hand, as the paragon of the Symbolic, represents the hegemony of patriarchal institutions. Like the superego, he categorizes and excludes. Just as the subject opposes the object, and so the superego the abject, Creon excludes the body of Polyneices as an impurity, a contaminant. The corpse lies unburied on the border of the city walls, however, and contaminates the Symbolic from its banished position. Creon's rejection of the feminine emphasizes his subordination of the maternal. He is extremely concerned with the maintenance of boundaries between male and female. As he states, "I am not a man, but she is the man, if I cede this victory to her with impunity" (484-485). He says that he would rather be usurped by a man "than be called weaker than woman-kind" (676-680). Creon's valorization of the male elucidates his role as the *hégemôn* of the Symbolic.

The ambiguity of language in the *Antigone* suggests the tension between the institutionalized, fixed significations of the Symbolic and the semiotic's hidden discourse. In Sophocles's play, the same words have vastly different meanings in the mouths of Antigone and Creon. As Simon Goldhill has pointed out, Antigone's conception of *philos* is antiquated, even Homeric; it refers simply to one's blood relatives, the members of the *oikos*, "household." Therefore, Antigone defines *echthros*, "enemy," as anyone who threatens or disregards the family. Antigone's values should be seen as anterior to the rise of the polis, when the *oikos* was subsumed by a "family" of interdependent citizens.¹⁸ Creon, as the representative of the nascent city-state, defines *philos* and *echthros* only in relation to political loyalty. As Vernant argues, the protagonists' antinomous conceptions of *philos* and *echthros* recreate the political and religious conflict in linguistic terms. He states:

So the function of the words used on stage is not so much to establish communication between the various characters as to indicate blockages and barriers between them and the impermeability of their minds, to locate the points of conflict. (42)

Vernant uses this definition of linguistic antagonism to argue that it is the "one-sidedness" of both characters which leads to their demise (42-3). Like Oudemans, Vernant seems to imply that the argument between Antigone and Creon represents a conflict between rights that are diametrically opposed, but equally legitimate. While this view is certainly arguable, Oudemans is so interested in the discovery of neat, formulaic oppositions that he tends to obscure significant textual evidence.

In "The Episodes of Sophocles' Antigone," Oudemans proposes that Creon and Antigone represent claims that are oppositional and "one-sided," but equally valid. This is not to say that Oudemans views their arguments as infallible or unassailable; in fact, he seems to suggest that the protagonists are diametrically opposed precisely *because* of the ambiguity of their positions. Oudemans' strategy is to reduce the conflict to a neat binary opposition by emphasizing the fallibility of both claims. He begins by presenting sound arguments for the contradictory nature of Creon's position. For example, Oudemans points out that Creon must acknowledge his consanguinity with the defiled Oedipus, even as the new king claims that his ascension is auspicious for the city (161). On the other hand, he argues that Creon's decisions are divinely sanctioned because of the "interconnected nature" of sovereignty, the city and religion (160).¹⁹ Whether the actions of a sacrilegious *tyrannos* would enjoy divine support, however, is open to question. Creon's contemptuous attitude towards the authority of Hades and his final condemnation of Zeus *Dikē* not only illustrate his impiety, but also nullify his sovereignty. Although Oudemans emphasizes the risk of Creon's lofty position in the city, he does not acknowledge his abuse of power (163).

Because Creon's actions are so vulnerable to criticism, Oudemans must attempt to undermine Antigone in order to preserve the structural symmetry of the play. While he admits the legitimacy of the divine principle that Antigone upholds, he emphasizes her "one-sidedness" and claims that she refuses to recognize the divine sanction of the king because she "challenges the whole interconnected order" (166). To support this argument, Oudemans cites lines 453-54, in which Antigone repudiates the *kêrugma* ("edict") of Creon. Oudemans fails to recognize that Antigone does not challenge the relationship between sovereignty and divine sanction; instead, she questions the legitimacy of a

tyrannos who would deny the sacred obligation of burial. Significantly, Antigone never blasphemes Zeus *Dikê* here, or anywhere else in the play. She specifically denies Zeus' association with Creon's proclamation (450). Furthermore, Oudemans's contention that Antigone recklessly transgresses the boundaries of acceptable feminine behavior when she buries her brother seems to ignore the fact that no one else is either willing (Ismene and Creon have refused), or able (the other family members are dead) to perform the ritual. If we acknowledge the sanctity of this rite, who else could possibly perform it *but* Antigone?

The textual evidence suggests that Antigone is a more righteous figure than Creon. For example, a supernatural storm is sent by the gods either to punish the guards for uncovering Polyneices's corpse, or to obscure Antigone's return (417-423). In either case, this intervention on behalf of Antigone suggests that her actions are divinely sanctioned. Unlike Antigone, Creon is sacrilegious. During the course of the play, he not only ridicules the authority of Hades (524), but also eventually blasphemes the divinity whom he has celebrated as his patron, celestial Zeus (1039-1044). In contrast, Antigone does not impugn the rights of the polis; she questions the authority of its *tyrannos* (e.g., 48, 453-459). The difference between these attitudes emphasizes Antigone's piety. Also, as Bernard Knox points out, Antigone's unyielding character reflects her primacy in the text and associates her with other Sophoclean heroes, such as Oedipus and Ajax. Creon, on the other hand, despite his initial obstinacy, abdicates his principles almost entirely. His eventual capitulations suggest that he is the weaker character (Knox 62-89). There is other textual evidence of Antigone's righteousness, but it is not necessary to give a comprehensive statement of it here. Therefore, while Vernant and Oudemans may be right that the protagonists' arguments are "one-sided," the positions of Antigone and Creon are not *equally* legitimate.

In addition to Antigone's and Creon's opposing conceptions of *philos*, *echthros* and *nomos*, there are other major linguistic conflicts in the play. There is a revealing difference between the most significant example of civic language in the *Antigone*, Creon's *kêrugma*, and Antigone's *agraphoi nomoi*, "unwritten laws" (invoked by her in 454). As we might expect of the Symbolic's language, the *kêrugma* is proscriptive; no one may bury the body of Polyneices. It is a state-sponsored categorization which institution-

alizes the discrimination between the two brothers. The *kêrugma* parallels the exclusion of the object by the Symbolic. Like the language of a monolithic, unitary superego, the proclamation represents the prejudicial repudiation of the Other by one man, Creon. Also, like the discourse of the Symbolic, the *kêrugma* represents the nascent authority of the *polis*.

In contrast, Antigone's *agraphoi nomoi* are so ancient that "no one knows their origin in time" (457); that is, they represent a precultural authority. These unwritten laws are not proscriptive, but prescriptive; they demand the burial of *all* who have died. They do not discriminate. As Antigone says, "Death yearns for equal justice for all the dead" (519). This absolute absence of categorization parallels the heterogeneity of the pre-oedipal phase. Furthermore, unlike the *kêrugma*, the authority for the obligation of burial is not unitary; it seems to be shared by a number of deities, including Hades, Zeus *katachthonios*, and Persephone, suggesting the polyphony of the maternal. The antithetical language of Creon and Antigone in regard to burial, law, and friendship, is distilled in her defiant statement to the king: "Nothing that you say is in accordance with my thoughts. I pray it never will be. Nor will there ever be anything pleasing to you in what I say" (499-501).

If there is a symbolic purification of the object in the play, it occurs when Creon recognizes his mistake and attempts to save Antigone (1210-1240). When the king discovers her dead body and witnesses the suicide of his son (1192-1243), he confronts the object. Now he is compelled to acknowledge what he has excluded so adamantly, the Other. The king's wail of recognition pronounces his self-abjection; his hysterical desire for suicide defines him as *pharmakos*:

Oh no!
I shudder with affright.
O for a two-edged sword to slay outright
A wretch like me,
made one with misery! (1307-1311)²⁰

The hegemony of the symbolic order has become the source of Creon's own contamination. Now, as the text indicates, he must recognize his own intimate connection with the defilement of Oedipus and the Labdacids, although he has tried to suppress it. Unlike the salubrious effect of reintegration in Kristeva's theory,

however, Creon's recognition of the abject accentuates his demise. The disastrous effects of confronting the abject in the play may define limits for the use of modern, psychoanalytical theory to interpret ancient drama. On the other hand, if we speculate that the citizens of Thebes come to recognize the legitimacy of Antigone's allegiance to chthonic authority, the city is cleansed, in some sense, according to Kristeva's concept of "purification." Nevertheless, it seems inappropriate to propose that the *dénouement* of the *Antigone* is a salutary, but "negative resolution"—the oxymoron underscores the fallacy of such a notion—since the text indicates otherwise. Antigone has killed herself, Creon is an *empsychon nekron*, "living corpse" (1167). While the king's own body becomes a metonym for self-abjection, his *miasma* spreads outward in a widening pool of defilement. In a frightening acceleration of destruction at the end of the play, the whole family is exterminated.

A Kristevan reading of Sophocles's *Antigone* requires neither textual manipulation, nor the imposition of structural categories unsupported by the play. Although Kristeva's theory may not be perfectly applicable to the *Antigone*, it serves as a useful hermeneutic technique for the analysis of the primary conflict between Antigone and Creon. There is no question that Antigone represents a more antiquated period of Greek society when the *oikos* was predominant and allegiance was determined by the family. As I have suggested in this paper, it is interesting to view the play as a depiction of the rise of the *polis* and its historical development from the precultural "infancy" of civilization. As the *polis* excludes the authority of the older, chthonic gods and, therefore, its association with the maternal body, it ushers in the new hegemony of the Symbolic over the maternal and the superego's subjugation of the primitive, pre-oedipal phase.

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Notes

¹ See, e.g., Levi-Strauss's *The Raw and the Cooked* (48, 55, 57, 62, 64, 81-2, 286, 295-6, 312). Madan Sarup also discusses Lacan's indebtedness to Levi-Strauss (1, 2, 10, 31, 43, 44, 152).

² Although he does not state it explicitly, it is likely that Lacan is referring to a *male* child: any attempt to introduce a female into this system of conflicts would be highly problematic. Nevertheless, unlike Kristeva, Lacan does not make specific gender distinctions. In fact, one could take the position that Kristeva's conception of the opposition between a patriarchal Symbolic and maternal semiotic actually *codifies* the exclusion of the feminine. It is not surprising that many modern French feminists, including Luce Irigaray and Hélène Cixous, have rejected not only the Lacanian model, but also Kristeva's. Irigaray has provided one of the more provocative transfigurations of Lacanian theory in "Plato's Hysteria" (243-364). In this chapter, she reinterprets Plato's Allegory of the Cave (*Republic* VII, 514-517a) as an inversion of the Lacanian Symbolic in which the cave represents the primacy of the womb. Whether Irigaray avoids the problems of essentialism simply by reversing the symbolic order, however, is open to question.

³ The heterogeneous register of the imaginary coincides with the preliminary stage of the child's development of identity. It must be distinguished from Lacan's abstruse notion of the "real," a state that is completely *outside* of all systems of signification.

⁴ I use the term "object" to indicate not only the Freudian differentiation between the ego and the "object of desire," but also to suggest the Lacanian elaboration of Freudian concepts in regard to discourse as the opposition between the "subject of enunciation" (the "I") and the predicate "object." For a more detailed discussion of the difference between Freudian theory and Lacan, see Madan Sarup (25-33).

⁵ As the etymology suggests, this is the phase before the child "positions" himself (from the Greek *tithēmi*, "to place") in opposition to the object in language; that is, before the "positing of signification." See Kristeva, *RPL* in *The Kristeva Reader* (98-100). The thetic phase is roughly equivalent to Lacan's "mirror stage."

⁶ Kristeva describes the difference between "genotext" and "phenotext" in *RPL*:

The [genotext] encompasses the emergence of object and subject, and the constitution of nuclei of meaning involving categories.... The genotext is thus the only transfer of drive energies that organizes a space in which the subject is not yet a split unity.... The genotext can thus be seen as language's

underlying foundation. We shall use the term *phenotext* to denote language that serves to communicate ... [it] is constantly split up and divided, and is irreducible to the semiotic process that works through the genotext. The phenotext is a structure ... the genotext is a process. (*The Kristeva Reader* 120-1)

⁷ We should not conclude, however, that Kristeva sees the semiotic as a means of actually overthrowing modern society. Despite her early affiliation with the *Tel Quel*, she appears to have lost faith in actual political revolution by 1974 when *Revolution in Poetic Language* was published. See Calvin Bedient (809). Indeed, she makes very few references to political events in *Powers of Horror*. One assumes that Kristeva's theory of the abject is intended primarily to challenge the strict institutions of language. In other words, at this point, her approach is strictly theoretical.

⁸ These effects could be defined both as what is "acted upon" by the superego (e.g., as a sexual object) and what is "thrown out" (excrement, semen, vomit, etc.).

⁹ In other words, Kristeva seems to imply that the process of purification requires nothing more than a recognition of the maternal (through *jouissance*), which would undermine the hegemony of the Symbolic because the exclusionary relationship between the superego and abject would now be impossible. I must admit, however, that this is my own inference from *Powers of Horror*; in fact, Kristeva does not give a satisfactory explanation of this process. It seems likely that this difficulty illustrates the impracticality of attempting to apply such a recondite theory to actual experience.

¹⁰ Kristeva's theory of the relationship between defamiliarizing poetry and the maternal drives is discussed by Calvin Bedient and Elizabeth Grosz.

¹¹ Kristeva's use of the concept of a "mythic discourse" reflects the profound influence in literary criticism of ideas promulgated by Claude Levi-Strauss and his structural anthropology. See, e.g., Levi-Strauss' *The Savage Mind* (*passim*) and *The Raw and the Cooked* (e.g., 48, 123, 132, 340).

¹² Vernant provides an excellent description of both the ambiguity of Oedipus's roles and his ruinous ignorance:

Installed in his role of solver of riddles and king dispensing justice, convinced that the gods inspire him, and proclaiming himself the son of Tuche, Good Luck, how could Oedipus possibly understand that he is a riddle to himself to which he will only guess the meaning when he discovers himself to be the opposite to what he thinks he is: not *Tuche's* son at all but his victim, not the dispenser of justice but the criminal, not

the king saving his city but the abominable defilement by which it is being destroyed? (45)

¹³ Ambiguity of status is certainly not unique to Oedipus. In fact, it is a defining characteristic of *all* heroes. It may be instructive to view Hesiod's Five Ages of Man (*Works and Days*, 110-200) as an early, metaphorical expression of the hero's intermediary position between gods and men. Aristotle comments that the extraordinary character of heroes contributes to their ambiguous status (*NE* 7.1.2.-1145a, 22f.). For an incisive and imaginative analysis of the linguistic evidence concerning this subject in ancient texts, see Gregory Nagy (174-210).

¹⁴ I must admit, however, that I have some reservations about applying this modern, psychoanalytical theory to an ancient drama. I am aware that such insouciant conflation of primary texts with literary criticism provoke the hostility of more traditional classicists. Therefore, as a means of providing a preemptive defense, I assert that reinterpretations of the ancient text, so long as they are qualified sufficiently as speculative, serve not only to rejuvenate literature which might otherwise become ossified, but may even uncover new insights about Greek psychology.

¹⁵ All translations of the Greek are mine, unless otherwise indicated.

¹⁶ If we view Hades in the context of the abject, it is interesting to consider that he voluntarily leaves the company of the Olympians for his "hidden" realm of death. In other words, he is not "thrown out" of the sky. For the ancient Greeks who evolved Hades' myth, perhaps death was not "abject," although the overwhelmingly negative depiction of the underworld in Homer casts doubt upon this possibility. For a more detailed discussion of the associations between chthonic monsters and the dead, see Walter Burkert's unparalleled work, *Greek Religion* (190-203).

¹⁷ See Emile Benveniste (212-215, 217-222). It must be admitted, however, that Benveniste's fascinating conclusions are difficult to confirm. Furthermore, a matrilineal origin, even if it is exceedingly archaic, suggests the presence of some kind of culture. Therefore, it is difficult to postulate a "precultural" existence.

¹⁸ The opposition of these terms is examined in great detail by Simon Goldhill in *Reading Greek Tragedy*. See especially 88-106. My discussion here owes a great deal to his analysis.

¹⁹ I am somewhat puzzled by Oudemans's frequent invocation of the concept of "interconnectedness." His use of this structural device seems non-specific and ambiguous.

²⁰ This translation is from *Sophocles*, vol.1. Trans. F. Storr. (Cambridge: Harvard UP [Loeb Classical Library], 1912).

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L'entrée royale de Saint-Simon: Événement narcissique

Diane Duffrin

Louis de Rouvroy, duc de Saint-Simon décrit dans ses *Mémoires* un royaume en déclin (Brody "Peintre"). D'après les *Mémoires*, le règne de Louis XIV n'était pas glorieux, mais ruineux. Ce roi accueillait dans la famille royale ainsi que dans la société noble le sang de ceux d'une naissance inférieure. Dans ses *Mémoires* Saint-Simon crée une opposition binaire entre la vraie noblesse, dont il faisait partie, et ceux qui prétendait à un rang noble. Cette bipolarité mènera à un examen de la glorification narcissique de l'écrivain par lui-même dans les deux scènes dont il s'agira ici, la séance du Parlement après la mort de Louis XIV en 1715 et le lit de justice de 1718.

Très fier de son statut social de duc et pair, Saint-Simon croyait tout statut social immuable. Il ne comprenait pas que l'on puisse violer les lois sacrées de la pureté de la noblesse. Après avoir mélangé son sang royal et pur au sang infecte du peuple, l'action la plus infâme qu'a commise Louis XIV a été de donner à ses bâtards un rang au-dessus de celui de duc et pair. Saint-Simon écrit au sujet des bâtards: "Leur rang égalé à celui des princes du sang avoit coûté au Roi le renversement de toutes les règles et les droits, et celui des lois du royaume les plus anciennes, les plus saintes, les plus fondamentales, les plus intactes" (12:41).¹ Ce "favoritisme sacrilège et négateur de l'Etat" (de Waelhens 285) était "une violence faite par Louis d'abord à son état de Roi, et, en conséquence, à l'Etat de la France" (Brody, "Structures" 68). C'est à travers l'Etat que la noblesse peut s'identifier comme telle; la majesté du corps de l'Etat se communique à ses membres. Pour Saint-Simon, cette identification est plutôt personnelle. L'Etat devient l'objet grâce auquel il réalise sa plénitude narcissique.

Selon la psychanalyse, chaque enfant passe par un stade de narcissisme. Au sein de sa mère, il se conçoit comme un avec le sein, qui assoupit son désir. Pour remplir le manque laissé par la privation du sein, il cherche un autre objet qu'il trouve dans sa propre image. Le narcissisme, loin d'être le désir de l'Autre, est au contraire le désir de l'Un, car le Moi refuse la division qu'exige le stade de

miroir lacanien. Il recherche une unité complète entre le Moi et l'objet désiré, une image parfaite de lui-même.²

Parce que l'objet du désir primaire est le sein de la mère, le manque que crée la privation du sein est normalement lié à elle. Mais pour Saint-Simon c'est le titre ducal, comme le sein pour le bébé, qui lui fournit la "source de son être [complet], assumption qui ira jusqu'à l'identification sans réserve" (de Waelhens 18); il "s'identifie absolument à sa dignité ducale" (de Waelhens 228) qui "signifie pour lui, au sens le plus strict et le plus radical, non pas une, mais *la* raison d'exister" (de Waelhens 329). Ce titre exemplaire et sublime devient l'objet désiré à travers lequel Saint-Simon conçoit son unité narcissique, l'attachant ainsi à un niveau primaire à son père.

La ducalité que Saint-Simon hérite de son père est pourtant imparfaite. Tout d'abord, Claude de Saint-Simon ne remplissait pas suffisamment la fonction de noble. Il était politiquement désengagé, ce qui est inexcusable aux yeux du mémorialiste. En tant que duc et pair, on doit assumer la responsabilité qui accompagne son titre; les privilèges dont on bénéficie impliquent nécessairement des obligations sociales. Bien que Saint-Simon tente d'excuser le comportement de son père (sa jeunesse à la cour de Louis XIII, le désir de ne pas abuser de son amitié personnelle envers le Roi) (de Waelhens 20), le vide que laisse l'image défectueuse du père aux yeux d'un fils si farouchement fier de son titre entraîne aussi un manque psychologique.

Qui plus est, le futur mémorialiste est né quand Claude de Saint-Simon avait déjà soixante-neuf ans. Pendant toute sa vie, il a quêté un père pour le remplacer (de Waelhens). Il a trouvé des figures paternelles en Beauvillier, Pontchartrain, Rancé, et en le "'père fondateur' que Saint-Simon n'a jamais connu" (de Waelhens 75), Louis XIII. Saint-Simon concevait aussi un autre père symbolique: l'Etat. Car, à son origine, l'Etat, comme un père qui lègue à ses enfants sa condition noble, donna des titres de noblesse qui se transmettaient de génération en génération. Pour Saint-Simon, l'Etat, comme un père, transmet au noble sa noblesse.

Ce père symbolique laisse au titre de Saint-Simon une tache d'imperfection. Le Roi Louis XIV, le représentant corporel de l'Etat, est un mauvais père qui "sacrifie son peuple à la gloire personnelle" (de Waelhens 89-90). Il soutient le mélange du sang noble au sang commun comme il soutient l'embourgeoisement du gouvernement.

Les actions de Louis XIV sont criminelles aux yeux de Saint-Simon et sont aussi un affront à son identité, car l'Etat auquel il s'identifie si absolument est terni et imparfait. Ne pouvant retourner en arrière pour corriger les torts que son père véritable a fait à son titre, Saint-Simon cherche à purifier l'objet même qui définit ce titre: l'Etat. S'il accomplit cette tâche, il trouvera son objet désiré, le titre épuré qui représente l'image exemplaire qu'il a de lui-même.

Il achève symboliquement cette gloire narcissique dans la scène du lit de justice de 1718 qui couronne toute son action politique. Saint-Simon entre dans ce lit de justice en sachant le secret du conseil de la Régence: la privation des bâtards de leurs titres. Les bâtards de Louis XIV représentent l'impureté de l'Etat sous le feu Roi, et leur chute, la purification symbolique de l'Etat, sera pour Saint-Simon un rêve réalisé; c'est "[s]on affaire" personnelle (15:50). Il profite de ce moment glorieux; en décrivant son entrée sur scène, il se dépeint comme s'il était lui-même le Roi. En tant que Roi, il s'attend à restituer la perfection de sa ducalité; la purification de l'Etat en sera aussi une de son titre. Après l'arrivée du Régent et du Roi, pourtant, il est relégué à son statut de duc et pair. Cette scène est remarquable dans la mesure où le mémorialiste avait été essentiellement le témoin d'un siècle; dans cette scène, cependant, il se prend pour l'acteur principal en se mettant au centre du spectacle. La déviation rend nécessaire un examen du statut du personnage et de l'écrivain.

Une comparaison entre cette scène et celle de 1715 où le bâtard duc du Maine s'attend à hériter du pouvoir royal montre la juxtaposition binaire entre le sang noble et le sang impur ainsi qu'elle montre une glorification de soi par l'auteur. En 1715, la mort de Louis XIV entraîne une séance du Parlement pendant laquelle le testament et le codicille du feu Roi sont lus. Le duc du Maine, l'aîné des bâtards de Louis XIV, connaît déjà le secret qui sera révélé ce jour-là: son père lui a légué le contrôle du conseil de la Régence. Son désir de pouvoir, pourtant, ne sera pas réalisé; un acte de parlement annule le testament et son cousin de sang pur, le duc d'Orléans, reçoit la Régence.

Le duc du Maine entre dans la salle plein de confiance; Saint-Simon écrit qu'il "crevoit de joie" (12:82). Ce commentaire étrange, impliquant que du Maine n'est pas assez fort physiquement pour soutenir la force de sa joie, indique la faiblesse d'une personne d'une naissance inférieure. Saint-Simon, par contre, ne crève pas de

joie quand il entre dans le lit de justice de 1718, mais il est "saisi de joie" (15:41), comme si l'exaltation de la chute des bâtards, qui va relever le royaume "par la force de ressort" (15:48) à son ancien statut moral, l'attendait les bras ouverts.

Le manque de dignité du duc du Maine est encore évident dans son comportement: il devrait être modeste devant le monde malgré son bonheur, mais "la politesse ... sembloit ... combattre" son "air riant et satisfait" (12:83). En comparaison à l'air ignoble du duc du Maine, Saint-Simon prend conscience de la conduite requise de la part de quelqu'un de son rang. Malgré sa joie écrasante, il profite de la pause avant d'entrer dans le parquet: "J'en eus besoin aussi afin de me remettre assez pour voir distinctement ce que je considérais, et pour reprendre une nouvelle couche de sérieux et de modestie" (15:41). Bien qu'ils essayent tous deux de contenir leur joie, Saint-Simon dépeint l'insouciance du bâtard tandis que l'auteur sait maintenir son calme et sa dignité devant le monde.

Saint-Simon relève aussi un développement dans la manière dont du Maine se comporte alors qu'il pénètre dans la séance. Il n'a plus "l'air riant" qu'il avait en entrant:

Il saluoit à droit et à gauche, et perçoit chacun de ses regards. Entré dans le parquet quelques pas, son salut aux présidents eut un air de jubilation, que celui du premier président réfléchissoit d'une manière sensible. Aux pairs le sérieux, ce n'est point trop dire le respectueux, la lenteur, la profondeur de son inclination vers eux de tous les trois côtés fut parlante. Sa tête demeura abaissée même en se relevant, tant est forte la pesanteur des forfaits aux jours même qu'on ne doute plus du triomphe. (12:83)

D'un homme qui "perçoit chacun de ses regards," sous les yeux des vrais nobles, son comportement joyeux se modifie en l'expression d'un signe de son infériorité: "sa tête demeura abaissée même en se relevant."

Sous les yeux de toute l'assemblée, Saint-Simon ne subit pas une perte de confiance comme c'est le cas chez du Maine. Au contraire, il vit un moment d'ascension avec la bénédiction de tous:

J'avancai lentement vers le greffier en chef, et, reployant entre les deux bancs, je traversai la largeur de la salle par-devant les gens du Roi, qui me saluèrent d'un air riant, et je montai nos trois marches des sièges hauts, où tous les pairs

que je marque étaient en place, qui se levèrent dès que j'approchai du degré. Je les saluai avec respect du haut de la troisième marche. (15:42)

On voit avec quels délices il nage dans ses moments de gloire, prolongés par sa marche lente. Les gens du roi, et non le duc du Maine, ont cet "air riant" qui annonce la vie sans soucis qui accompagne la victoire. Et contrairement au duc du Maine qui tient "sa tête abaissée même en se relevant," un présage de l'échec total de ses ambitions politiques, Saint-Simon salue l'assemblée "du haut de la troisième marche."

En comparaison au duc du Maine qui se trompe sur sa gloire attendue, Saint-Simon est assuré du succès de ses projets. Chacun s'attend à un "coup d'Etat":

on appellera coup d'Etat l'action qui décide quelque chose d'important pour le bien de l'Etat et du prince, l'acte extraordinaire auquel un gouvernement a recours pour ce qu'il conçoit être le salut de l'Etat: action décisive, extrême, violente ... (Marin, "Pour une théorie" 19)

Bien que du Maine croie que le secret³ du contenu du testament de son père sera un coup d'Etat en sa faveur, il se trompe. Pour Saint-Simon, cependant, le secret révélé sera un coup d'Etat et mènera au "salut de l'Etat."

Au lit de justice de 1718, Saint-Simon arrive avant le Roi Louis XV, le Régent et leur entourage. Tout le monde y est déjà présent, une grande partie d'entre eux réveillée en pleine nuit pour cette séance importante. Chacun est conscient que Saint-Simon est au courant des événements à venir parce qu'il faisait parti du conseil de la Régence. Entrant par la même porte par laquelle va entrer le Roi, Saint-Simon se met, comme le duc du Maine, au centre du spectacle. Le duc du Maine s'attend à remplacer le Roi, mais c'est Saint-Simon qui le fera.

Pendant les quelques minutes qui précèdent l'entrée du reste du conseil, l'identification de Saint-Simon à l'Etat prend un caractère plus profond. Il jouit de quelques instants de gloire: il s'approprie l'état du Roi, pour ainsi dire, qui est aussi celui de l'Etat. L'assemblée qui attend le Roi fixe son attention sur celui qui entre à sa place: "sitôt que je parus, tous les yeux s'arrêtèrent sur moi" (15:41). En tant que Roi symbolique, le détenteur du secret du coup d'Etat à venir, Saint-Simon, la représentation du Roi, devient le Savoir, la

Justice, la Bonté. Il entre en défilé royal, suivi des nobles importants: "Le passage se trouva assez libre, les officiers des gardes du corps me firent faire place, et au duc de la Force et au maréchal de Villars, qui me suivoient un à un" (15:41). Puis, comme un Souverain, il s'arrête un instant pour poser les yeux sur son peuple. Il avance lentement et traverse la salle en saluant ses gens qui répondent chaleureusement et respectueusement, comme ils le feraient s'il s'agissait du Roi. Ensuite, de la même façon que le Roi montera les marches devant son trône, Saint-Simon monte les trois marches jusqu'aux sièges hauts où s'asseyent les ducs et pairs. "[D]u haut de la troisième marche," il salue tous les ducs déjà présents qui se lèvent en sa présence. Il prend la Feuillade "par l'épaule," un geste du seigneur à son vassal qui remonte au Moyen Âge et qui indique que le Roi lui accorde un honneur. Ici, l'honneur n'est autre que de lui dire le secret du coup d'État à venir.

En tant que Roi, il a le pouvoir de rétablir l'État à son ancien statut d'honneur.⁴ Grâce au secret qu'il détient, son "père" l'État, son héritage et donc lui-même sont purifiés. Cet acte mégalomane d'appropriation lui permet de réaliser son Moi narcissique; d'après Green, l'identification est le moyen par lequel le Moi réussit à devenir l'objet de son désir. Elle "supprime la représentation de l'objet, le Moi devenant cet objet lui-même, se confondant avec lui" (21). Pendant quelques moments, donc, Saint-Simon achève l'unité narcissique de son Moi et l'objet désiré. La revendication de l'État mène nécessairement à la rejustification de son titre, et il éprouve une joie incomparable.⁵

Dans ses *Mémoires*, Saint-Simon jouit aussi de l'action de regarder les autres.⁶ Par le regard scopophilique, le mémorialiste peut objectiver, posséder dans son imagination, et annihiler ceux qui causent l'infamie de l'État. Le titre de duc et pair lui donne un statut social élevé, mais il n'a pas de pouvoir réel; il ne peut qu'écrire ses pensées dans un journal privé. Mais en s'identifiant au Roi, il s'imagine omnipotent et tout-voyant. Marin souligne la relation entre la prolifération des représentations du Roi partout dans le royaume et le pouvoir omniprésent qu'elles incarnaient ("Pour une théorie"). Saint-Simon, en s'appropriant cette position, devient donc l'absolu du témoin absolu; il peut tout voir et tout lire, satisfaisant ainsi son désir épistémophilique de tout observer et tout savoir.⁷

Deson regard tout-puissant, il "assen[e]" le premier président du parlement. Il décrit la souffrance extrême sur le visage de cet homme qui, comme le duc du Maine, représente la force opposée à l'Etat. "Le premier président perdit toute contenance; son visage, si suffisant et si audacieux, fut saisi d'un mouvement convulsif; l'excès seul de sa rage le préserva de l'évanouissement" (15:48). Saint-Simon éprouve du plaisir sadique à regarder cette souffrance, qu'il décrit souvent en métaphores religieuses. Après le deuxième discours du Garde des sceaux, il regarde le premier président, qui

tremblait [s]a voix entrecoupée, la contrainte de ses yeux, le saisissement et le trouble visible de toute sa personne, démentaient ce reste de venin dont il ne put refuser la libation à lui-même et à sa Compagnie. Ce fut là ou je savourai, avec tous les délices qu'on ne peut exprimer, le spectacle de ces fiers légistes qui osent nous refuser le salut, prosternés à genoux, et rendre à nos pieds un hommage au trône, tandis qu'assis et couverts, sur les hauts sièges, aux côtés du même trône, ces situations et ces postures, si grandement disproportionnées, plaident seules avec tout le perçant d'évidence la cause de ceux qui véritablement et d'effet sont *laterales Regis* contre ce *vas electum* du tiers état. (15:46-47)

Son emploi de métaphores religieuses demande une toute autre étude; mais il est évident, par ces références, que le renouvellement de l'Etat est, à son avis, lié à une glorification divine. L'Etat sous Louis XIV, ainsi qu'une nouvelle Eve, avait cédé à la tentation des parlementaires et des ministres funestes (dont Madame de Maintenon), ce "*vas electum* du tiers état" qui cherchaient l'élévation sociale sous le Roi Soleil. "[L]e reste de venin," leur propre venin, que doivent boire les présidents rappelle donc le serpent dans le Jardin d'Eden qui tentait l'innocence d'Eve. Mais cette fois-ci, Eve résiste à la tentation. Comme dans un rite cérémonieux, les présidents doivent boire ce v(en)in; mais le vin est empoisonné, rappelant le désir de Saint-Simon de détruire ses ennemis. Ces pécheurs sont "prosternés à genoux, ... [à] rendre à nos pieds un hommage au trône," tandis que les prêtres de cette cérémonie résurrectionnelle et "vivifiante" (15:49), lui et les autres ducs, sont "sur les sièges hauts." Auparavant, Saint-Simon écrit qu'il a été "traîné au Parlement en victime" (15:48) d'un sacrifice, mais maintenant glorifié à même titre que l'Etat, il trouve son

"salut," car l'Etat, comme le Christ, est ressuscité. Ne faisant qu'Un avec l'Etat, il achève le "plein accomplissement des désirs les plus véhéments et les plus continus de toute ma vie" (15:49).

Grâce à cette réussite momentanée, le Moi narcissique de Saint-Simon connaît sa plénitude. Mais le titre qui la lui fournit devient encore une fois défectueux à la fin de sa vie. Le Roi passe sa qualité royale symbolique au Roi suivant, assurant la vie continue de la Couronne, et donc de l'Etat: "Le Roi est mort! Vive le Roi!". Un noble passe aussi son titre de génération en génération, assurant une continuité de l'esprit de la noblesse dans sa famille. Mais pour Saint-Simon, la possibilité de l'immortalité est irréalisable. Quoiqu'il eût deux fils, l'aîné héritier de son titre, Saint-Simon n'eût point de petit-fils.⁸ Son titre et sa lignée, à la différence de ceux du Roi, meurent avec lui.

Pour remplir les fonctions requises de son titre, Saint-Simon cherche un héritier. Cet héritier lui donnera un miroir dans lequel l'homme narcissique pourra se regarder et voir son nom survivre et revivre sa gloire. Que fait-il donc pour satisfaire cet autre manque? Il écrit ses mémoires. Les *Mémoires* de Saint-Simon porteront pour toujours la gloire et la perfection de son titre. Ses *Mémoires* lui fournissent à la fois le miroir dans lequel son Moi peut se regarder, et, une fois passé à la postérité, un héritier qui perpétue son nom. Mais Saint-Simon ne les publie jamais; il meurt en 1755 et la première version autorisée n'est publiée qu'en 1829-30. En gardant son "héritier" à lui-même comme un père qui forme son fils, il ne contrarie pas les gens qui figurent dans ses *Mémoires*, ou bien leurs familles. Car ses portraits sont pour la plupart non-flatteurs, et s'il avait insulté quelqu'un, cette personne aurait pu traîner son nom, son titre dans la boue avant qu'il ne soit mort. Cela aurait détruit toute l'œuvre de sa vie: la gloire de son nom. En gardant ses *Mémoires* secrets, Saint-Simon attend le moment d'un nouveau coup d'Etat personnel—il veut renverser l'ordre de la nature en se garantissant l'immortalité. Son héritier, comme celui du Roi, comme celui de Dieu, ne mourra jamais.

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Notes

¹ Toutes références de Saint-Simon sont des *Mémoires* (Paris: Ramsay, 1978). Je mettrai le volume: la page.

² Quand l'adulte refuse de quitter ce stade enfantin, le narcissisme devient pathologique (Lacan *Ecrits*). Je ne dirais pas que Saint-Simon souffre d'une maladie pathologique, mais que cette structure ouvre une interprétation intéressante des scènes qui seront discutées.

³ Zempléni décrit la structure du secret. Le détenteur confie son secret à un conseiller, le dépositaire, qui gardera le secret du destinataire. Le détenteur du secret est normalement le Roi ou le Régent; dans ces cas, le dépositaire est Saint-Simon, et les destinataires sont tous ce qui ne le savent pas.

⁴ Au début du règne de Louis XIV, Apostolidès décrit le corps du Roi comme étant double: le corps personnel et le corps symbolique d'Etat se réunissent dans la personne du Roi. Pendant que Louis XIV consolidait son pouvoir, pourtant, il réussissait à annuler son corps personnel: il incarnait l'Etat. Les représentations du Roi, donc, devenaient nécessairement des images parfaites de l'Etat lui-même. Elles dépeignaient le détenteur du pouvoir fondé sur la force prodigieuse possible que possède le Roi. L'image du Roi valorise, donc, son propre pouvoir aux yeux du monde (Marin *Portrait*).

⁵ Le plaisir narcissique que reçoit Saint-Simon n'est pas essentiellement sexuel, comme dirait Freud (73-102). Plutôt, ce sont les plaisirs de l'esprit qui s'expriment chez Saint-Simon. Saint-Simon nous le dit lui-même: "Que les plaisirs des sens sont inférieurs à ceux de l'esprit..." (15:21).

⁶ Pour une autre étude du regard, voir Michel Guggenheim, "Sous le regard perçant de Saint-Simon," *MLN* 82:3 (May 1967): 291-305.

⁷ Selon Freud, l'épistémophilie est la recherche de la connaissance dont le résultat est le plaisir (Laplanche).

⁸ Saint-Simon a essayé de passer son titre au mari de sa petite-fille, mais cette pétition a été refusée par le Roi.

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Rhetoric, Referent and Performance: Reading in *La Nouvelle Héloïse*

Benjamin K. Kolstad

Julie, ou La Nouvelle Héloïse is a novel which has suffered much from those who have attempted to interpret it, as Paul de Man, in one of the most forceful and cogent readings of Rousseau's work, observes: "...We are still coping with a contingent and basically irrelevant misreading ... such a reading considers *Julie*, if it considers it at all, as if it would have preferred it to be the *Confessions* or the *Rêveries* rather than what it is" (189). In attempting to dialecticize what are commonly perceived to be the two halves of the novel, critics have, time and again, come up against a reading that requires a failure, either on their own part (which would be hard to admit) or on Rousseau's part. But in de Man's reading, the novel can no longer be split into the two halves of a dialectic between Rousseau the political and social theorist of *Du contrat social* and Rousseau the sentimental reader of Richardson. Instead, de Man argues, quoting Wordsworth, "we must discover another and finer connection than that of contrast" (de Man 192).

When de Man says "[a]ll the thematic problems of the work, the relationships between love, ethics, political society, religious experience, and their respective hierarchies, depend on the understanding of a term of which the meaning, for Rousseau, is by no means transparent" (de Man 193), he is adding Rousseau to the list of writers (Nietzsche, Rilke, Proust) whose texts unsettle the notion of reading, and hence require an immense effort to read. For de Man, everything in the work comes down to one crucial point—the referential moment. If language (in general, but particularly "literary" language) refers to a reality outside the text, the status of that reality must remain unquestioned in order for the referential moment to retain its authority. Rousseau's second Preface calls this moment, as well as the whole idea of reading, into question from the very beginning of the novel:

N. ...Cette correspondance est-elle réelle, ou si c'est une fiction?

R. Je ne vois point la conséquence.¹ (11)

This unsettling moment undermines the referential conventions on which reading is based. The play between the fictional Jean-Jacques and his interlocutor puts the authorship of the work into question, and with it, every claim to an extra-textual, verifiable referent. Love itself is seen as an illusion that stems from the very illusion on which textuality is founded. It builds "another Universe," and posits in it "objets qui ne sont point, ou auxquels lui seul a donné l'être" (15).

De Man looks to the second Preface to find support for his claim that the epistemological authority of the letters is uncertain, indeed, is unsettled by Rousseau himself. The "dialogue preface" is rich in Platonic overtones: for Plato, as for the characters in the second Preface, it is the rhetorical stance one assumes that determines the accuracy of one's argument. In Rousseau's preface, two characters, R. and N., debate the 'truth-status' of the letters which comprise the novel: are they 'real' or are they 'fictional'? R., whom most readers agree represents Rousseau himself, recognizes that N., the supposed 'publisher' of the novel, must precisely define "ce qui est essentiel à l'espece" (12) before arguing that the characters in the text are not representative of the species,² otherwise his rhetorical stance is liable to error. Socrates, whenever he finds "another man able to discern an objective unity and plurality, [he] follow[s] 'in his footsteps where he leadeth as a god'" (*Phaedrus* 512). This attempt to define the nature of the topic under discussion points to the question of referentiality. Whoever has the most well-defined rhetorical model Socrates will follow "as a god."

Similarly, the debate between R. and N. centers around questions of rhetoric and referentiality: R.'s claim that there is "no consequence" to the distinction between a real and a fictional correspondence throws N. back into the doubt which he had hoped to resolve by speaking to the owner of the manuscript. R.'s rhetorical stance refuses to authorize N.'s interpretation, putting the referential status of the letters in doubt: if they are a fiction, "Ces Lettres ne sont point des Lettres; ce Roman n'est point un Roman; les personnages sont des gens de l'autre monde" (12). If N.'s judgment is correct, then Rousseau's work must be an allegory, with divine rather than mortal characters. After all, if R.'s "beau raisonnement" were followed, and it did not matter whether the letters were real or fictional, "les Monstres inouis, les Géans, les Pygmées, les chimères de toute espece; tout pourrait être admis spécifiquement dans la nature" (12). N.'s interpretive model here is

classically Horatian (referential), in which the arts must imitate nature. A work of art which refuses to imitate nature (to refer to "reality") is "ridiculous," "incoherent," "chimerical."³ The second Preface thus appears to be a debate between two discursive models: R.'s Platonic model (rhetoric) and N.'s Horatian model (referentiality).

Hence the anxious appeal throughout the novel to some model for referential authority on which to base the construction of discourse in the textual, philosophical world: in the first half, the model is that of *amour*, passion; in the second, the model is divine, religious. De Man notices that neither model sustains itself: the "retrospective clarity" in the pivotal letter (Part Three, Letter 18) which uncovers the "narrative chain of successive errors [in the first half], as misleading for the reader as they were for the character" (212), "does not extend to the second part" (216). De Man seems to give the critical shrug when he confronts this lack of clarity, and turns to a model of allegorical reading in order to impose a kind of readability on the text. This is not to imply that de Man is faced with a conundrum from which he is unable or unwilling to extricate himself. On the contrary, his reading does a masterful job of unifying the novel around its central problematic—the concept of reading itself. I claim, however, that it is the anxiety stemming from the lack of referentiality in both 'halves' of the novel that unifies the text and gives it coherence and readability.

This anxiety is, above all things, an anxiety about the power and the authority of language. Appeals to authority are everywhere in the text, as the lovers seek to ground their passion in a metaphysical system that will sanction it—"un amour tel que le notre (sic) l'âme et la [l'âme] soutient ... que serions-nous si nous n'aimions plus?" (226); as Julie appeals for authority to an (epistemologically illusory) divine model to justify her renunciation of passion (but not love)—"le vrai modele (sic) des perfections dont nous portons tous une image en nous-mêmes" (358).

Elsewhere this anxiety is reflected in the various threats and abortive, contractual performatives that move the plot along through either/or choices: "Il faut vous fuir, Mademoiselle, je le sens bien" (31) implicitly concludes with "unless you tell me to stay." The episode in which Julie gives St. Preux money when he does finally leave (66-68) is another example of this performative threat: 'you take the money or I'll know the reason why, or you're not the man

I thought you were,' another crisis of self and referent. This threat of action combined with appeals to referentiality (the point of honor by which St. Preux refuses the gift becomes the basis of a referential attack—if St. Preux can prove that it is really his honor which motivates his refusal, Julie can accept it—otherwise he is one of those "gens pointilleux" whom she detests) sustains the novel throughout several hundred long, anxiously meditative letters.

De Man, faced with the uniformity of style and the lack of decisive events related in the letters, seems almost bored by their discursiveness; they threaten action rather than perform it. He concludes from this that they *have* no active power:

Unlike Laclos's letters in the *Liaisons Dangereuses*, which are as directly effective as bullets, the letters of the *Nouvelle Héloïse* rarely set out to accomplish anything beyond their own reading; apparent deviations from this norm would turn out, at more careful consideration, to be hardly exceptions at all. *Rousseau's text does not exploit the narrative possibilities of the letters as "actants", as direct plot-agents.* They appear rather to be reflective and retrospective musings, interpretations of events rather than being themselves the events. (193-194, emphasis added)

This conclusion is based on what appears to be an inaccurate assumption. For although the letters are indeed reflective and retrospective, and the novel does face "awkward moments when it comes to writing" (294), the letters—or at least the anxious search for referentiality that they reflect—do in fact cause the action of the novel, and do in fact have performative power.

The anxiety N. displays in the Preface is mirrored throughout the text, as Julie and St. Preux explore the various models for their own behavior, searching for a referential model which can sanction their own textual contract—call it the contract of the love-letter. This contract becomes invalid, however, for they can find no epistemologically sound referent for either their language or their actions. Each successive model in the text (passion, contract, duty) is based on error and substitution—metaphor on metaphor. Hence the anxiety of the lovers, and the constant lapse into epistemological error which de Man rightly notices:

The Second Preface to Julie thus links a deconstructive theory of reading with a 'new' [my quotes] sense of textuality.

The innumerable writings that dominate our lives are made intelligible by a preordained agreement as to their referential authority; this agreement however is merely contractual, never constitutive. It can be broken at all times and every piece of writing can be questioned as to its rhetorical mode.... Whenever this happens, what originally appeared as a document or an instrument becomes a text and, as a consequence, its readability is put into question. (204)

This sense of textuality is by no means new. In the *Phaedrus*, Plato shows that he was well aware of the problems of reading and of textuality: "That's the strange thing about writing, which makes it truly analogous to painting. The painter's products stand before us as though they were alive: but if you question them, they maintain a most majestic silence. It is the same with written words: they seem to talk to you as though they were intelligent, but if you ask them anything about what they say ... they go on telling you just the same thing for ever" (*Phaedrus* 521). The problem with texts for de Man, and "written words" for Plato's Socrates is that they have no more than a representative, mimetic ability. And without the referent, the object being imitated, they stand forever in need of their "parent": "And once a thing is put in writing, the composition, whatever it may be, drifts all over the place, getting into the hands not only of those who understand it, but equally of those who have no business with it; it doesn't know how to address the right people and not the wrong [as the rhetor, and R. in the Preface, presumably does]. And when it is ill-treated and unfairly abused it always needs its parent to come to its help, being unable to defend or help itself" (*Phaedrus* 521).

I do not mean to imply that de Man is one of those who "has no business" with Julie. On the contrary, his analysis of the referential moment in the text is insightful and informative. I am merely taking issue with his admittedly unclear stance on undecidability. De Man, confronted with the uncertainty of the text and the analogous uncertainty of the characters in it as to its own referential meaning, replaces the epistemologically aberrant referent that the characters try to assert with an allegorical reading: the epistemological incertitude of St. Preux and Julie is the figure for reading in general—founded on a contractual, not natural, referent. But he recognizes that this allegory (and here he hedges his bet) is itself a

reading based on the same substitution, and presumably the same error, as the text itself:

the assumption of readability, which is itself constitutive of language, cannot only no longer be taken for granted but is found to be aberrant. There can be no writing without reading, but all readings are in error because they assume their own readability.⁴ Everything written has to be read and every reading is susceptible of logical verification, but the logic that establishes the need for verification is itself unverifiable and therefore unfounded in its claim to truth. (202)

So where has he gotten? De Man's own text denies its readability, if here we take it at its word. One hopes that de Man is not saying that his own text is fundamentally unreadable. Presumably he is trying to account for the ultimate undecidability of referent for any text, which enables him to introduce his allegorical reading: "Allegorical narratives tell the story of the failure to read whereas tropological narratives, such as the *Second Discourse*, tell the story of the failure to denominate. *The difference is only a difference of degree and the allegory does not erase the figure*" (205, emphasis added). His assumption—that *La Nouvelle Héloïse* is an allegorical text whose rhetorical stance unsettles its own referential status—is very productive, for it allows him to treat the novel as a whole, rather than as two separate, mutually incompatible parts. He recognizes, as do most critics, the difficulty of relating the first half of the text, with its constant substitution of self and other, the confusion and cross-identification of souls of St. Preux and Julie, to the second half of the novel, where duty and the marriage contract supersede the contract of passion between "soul-lovers."⁵

De Man's program of allegorical reading is an attempt to restore referentiality to the text, to reimpose a meaning which Rousseau deliberately unsettles, but which we, as readers, 'must' assume is present. In this sense, de Man seems to be trying to emulate Julie, who replaces the referential model of the first half with another model of more "divine" (and presumably more legitimate) authority in the pivotal letter. De Man is trying to initiate an allegorical mode of reading which does not depend on (and is not vulnerable to) the problematic referent of the text. The allegory, then, is another form of contract between the reader and the author. It is a kind of contract that enables the author (or editor,

as the Second Preface reminds us), despite the lack of authority to perform which de Man notices in the letters, to deliver his message.

This reading seems plausible, but we shall see that in order for it to work, de Man has to deny the plainly performative nature of many of the pivotal letters (for example, Part One, Letter One, page 31—the letter which incites the series—cited above). This is where his argument becomes tenuous. Because despite the epistemological uncertainties, despite the aberrance of the lovers' views which becomes apparent in the second reading, after the pivotal letter, the letters do serve as actants. The characters' search for their authority to perform is itself performative; it is the very basis for the plot from the beginning, de Man's "plot-agent" par excellence.

Let us examine Austin's definition of the performative utterance and see if we can define exactly what it is that de Man finds lacking in the text. Austin lists several requirements that must be fulfilled in order for a statement to have performative power. First, he illustrates the general quality of a performative: "if a person makes an utterance of this sort, we should say that he is *doing* something rather than merely *saying* something" (222). He then gives several examples of this "performance of an act *in* saying something as opposed to ... an act *of* saying something" (99): saying "I do" in a marriage ceremony; apologizing; christening a ship. Austin makes the point that the category of truth does not apply to these statements; indeed "we shall see at once that they couldn't possibly be true or false (*PP*, 222)". There must also exist certain conventions, that determine the "felicity" of the performative utterance (Austin 99ff).

But Austin makes another point about the felicity of a performance: "the one thing we must not suppose is that what is needed in addition to the saying of the words in such cases is the performance of some internal spiritual act, of which the words are then to be the report" (223). It is perfectly allowable for an utterance to have performative power without the speaker having the slightest intention of actually carrying out his threat. For example, a storekeeper yelling "Stop, or I'll shoot!" at the back of a fleeing criminal can have the desired effect without the shopkeeper even having a gun, or a loaded gun. It is the intent of the performative that matters, not the truth or falsity of its constative dimension.

This enables St. Preux, in the by-now familiar letter (Part One, Letter One) to say "Il faut vous fuir, Mademoiselle, je le sens

bien," when fleeing is the last thing he wants to do. He invokes the authority of the love-convention with an entirely rhetorical statement,⁷ and, in doing so, performs the act that initiates the "long series of flights and returns" for which de Man can find no active initiation. The invocation of this authority of the lover is problematic for de Man, because it occurs outside the sanction of a referential moment. He finds the referent for the action to be epistemologically unreliable, and, in consequence, denies the performative power of the statement. In essence, he says, the authority—the convention—that St. Preux invokes does not exist, and therefore the statement must be in error. Any performative power it may have rests on a self-instituted, self-referential moment.⁸ But, if we look at Austin again, we find that this central ambiguity which precipitates de Man's allegorical reading can be clarified by treating this act as a performative utterance. For, in refining the nature of the performative utterance, Austin recognizes that "although these utterances do not themselves report facts and are not themselves true or false, saying these things does very often imply that certain things are true and not false ... *But still it is very important to realize that to imply that something or other is true, is not at all the same as saying something which is true itself*" (224, emphasis added). St. Preux is thus able to imply the existence of a love contract between Julie and himself, and Julie is able to accept this rhetorical trickery. And both of the lovers are able to enter into the model of love relations for which they ceaselessly seek a referent.

Austin goes on to say that "it is obvious that the conventional procedure which by our utterance we are purporting to use must actually exist" (224). This is somewhat paradoxical in light of his earlier recognition of the power of implication in the felicity of a performative. If one can imply things that are not true in a felicitous performative, why can one not imply that the convention by which one performs exists as well? That the convention one invokes is epistemologically unreliable does not mean that it does not exist, that it cannot be invoked. This idea, that the convention must actually exist in order for it to be invoked, is where de Man seems to (referentially) ground his argument. But I find this argument unsatisfying. It seems that, by allowing the epistemological uncertainty of a convention to be compatible with its invocation, one can make a stronger case for the *readability* of both halves of the novel

than de Man makes for their *unreadability* (which he then solves with the 'allegory' of reading).

Both Julie and St. Preux continually remind each other (and themselves) that the conventions they invoke do in fact exist. By their continued insistence on some epistemological referent—some authority for the models, the conventions, they invoke—the lovers reveal the anxiety about the "legitimacy" of referential language that permeates both halves of the book. This anxiety is in evidence throughout the text, and will become the basis for our rereading of the novel. Let us examine some examples of this anxiety of reference.

The rhetorical statement that begins the series of letters—"Il faut vous fuir"—is an attempt to invoke the authority of the love-convention that will give St. Preux certain "droits de cœur" over Julie. Indeed, the fact that he is proleptically invoking this convention of the lover before he is actually in the situation of the lover, does not matter. His textual performance which takes the authority of the lover for granted forces Julie—if she reads the letter instead of burning it or bringing it to her mother, as she ought to have done (342)—into implicitly recognizing his authority.

St. Preux insists upon the "droits d'amour," and continually defines himself against the referent of the "stock characters in a situation of sentimental tragedy, persecuted by the social inequities of wealth and class and by the caprices of a tyrannical father" (de Man 212) When he writes from Paris, lamenting the decline of love in the big city (where these social inequities are most prevalent), he reminds Julie of the rights of the lover, of the authority of the love/marriage contract: "On diroit que le mariage n'est pas à Paris de la même nature que par ailleurs. C'est un sacrement, à ce qu'ils prétendent, et ce sacrement n'a pas la force des moindres contracts civils" (271). He worries about this loss of love's authority as he continues: "L'amour même, l'amour a perdu ses droits et n'est pas moins dénaturé que le mariage ... les amans [in Paris] sont des gens indifférens qui se voyent par amusement."

Julie, however, learns the lesson of authority well, for even in the first half of the novel where St. Preux is seen as the dominant character Julie is able to use terms of contract and of authority to get him to do as she wants. She has authority over him, for example, when she forbids him to commit suicide—"J'emploie dans cette lettre une autorité à laquelle jamais l'homme sage n'a résisté. Si

vous refusez de vous y rendre, je n'ai plus rien à vous dire. . . ." (160). She seems to resemble the "législateur" of the *Contrat Social*, who appropriates authority through a performative use of language, creating a referent in a catachrestic act that produces a contract—as long as the others involved in the contract recognize her authority to appropriate the divine model. "The innumerable writings [and social contracts] which dominate our lives are made intelligible by a preordained agreement as to their referential authority: *this agreement however is merely contractual, never constitutive*" (204, emphasis added). Yet in the case of the *Social Contract*, this contractual agreement is constitutive; it constitutes the society in which we live. Merely recognizing that we choose to institute this contract does not give us the power to break it "at all times" as de Man claims.

Julie uses the same tactic of appropriating authority in the pivotal Letter 18 of Part Three when she announces a new model that is based on a more permanent and less illusory model than passionate love: divine love. By responding to this letter and thereby accepting Julie's invocation of divine authority (as he accepts her authority when she forbids him to commit suicide), St. Preux subjugates himself to her, and allows her to act, while he only reacts.

The structural parallels are numerous—in the first half, St. Preux is the teacher, guiding and judging Julie's actions, while in the second half, Julie, and to an increasingly greater degree Claire, possess the standard by which St. Preux's actions are judged. In the first half of the novel, St. Preux's letters are the initiators of most of the action,⁹ while in the second, Julie, Claire, Milord Edouard, and even Wolmar seem to take delight in showing St. Preux the error of his ways.

But the novel cannot simply be split into neat antitheses, as de Man recognizes. The allegory of love is his attempt to provide a unified reading of the work. I disagree with the extent of de Man's allegorical reading, but one must recognize that its attention to the importance of rhetoric in the novel is crucial. What I propose, as I hope I have already made clear, is that it is this very catachrestic act of invoking of authority, and the anxious need for referentiality that it reveals is the unifying tactic of the novel. It is not just love rhetorically defined and redefined that the "halves" of the novel are concerned with. It is the very anxiety about the "referential mo-

ment," of which de Man makes so much. But far from being simply a way out of a textual hole, an answer to undecidability, this referential appeal is the action of the novel. It is not an allegory, it is a catachresis. It is not substitution of self for author, of author for reader, it is institution of the contracts "which dominate our lives." True, the referents to which St. Preux and Julie appeal are contractual, and not constitutive, but that is the nature of the game. The reader lives in just such a contractual world as the lovers, where all appeals to referent and Truth are eventually undecidable. This ultimate undecidability notwithstanding, at some point or another all contracts must be instituted, invoked, or otherwise brought into being.

St. Preux resembles the Platonic character Lysias in his confused rhetorical invocation of the conventions of love; Julie resembles the "législateur" of the *Contrat Social* who appropriates the language of god for the affairs of men. Neither system is itself referentially sound, but it is the very search for referent that drives the plot of the novel. Without the invocation or the initiation of these contracts (which in itself implies performative power), the novel would have been much shorter. Indeed, would not have gotten past every author's worst nightmare—the blank page.

The various attitudes towards performatives throughout the text only illustrate the insistence on the referential moment that sustains the plot. Besides the famous discovery of the error of referent in Julie's long letter, there are many examples of appeals to authority and infelicitous utterances which provoke severe anxiety in the characters. In Part Four, Letter 13, Claire mentions the authority by which she counsels Julie: "Je ne prétens pas te donner mes raisons pour invincibles, mais te montrer seulement qu'il y en a qui combattent les tiennes, et cela suffit pour autoriser mon avis" (503, emphasis added). Fanchon Anet, in writing to St. Preux about Julie's fall into the water, worries about the performance her letter will affect on him: "Ah que deviendrez-vous quand vous saurez notre malheur?" (702). Le sage Wolmar himself worries about the effect of his words: "Lui annoncer sa dernière heure n'était-ce pas l'avancer? ... Etoit-ce à moi de lui donner la mort?" (707). Perhaps the most macabre example is when the Baron's "vieux domestique" sees Julie's corpse, "son imagination se frappe ; il voit Julie tourner les yeux, le regarder, lui faire une signe de tête. Il se lève avec transport et court par toute la maison, en criant que Madame n'est

pas morte... ." (736). If only saying it made it so. De Man is technically correct in that the letter is only an "interpretation ... of events rather than being [itself] the event... ." (194). But the epistemological error that founds the infelicitous utterance in this episode is closely akin to the one whose authority de Man invokes in denying performance to the letter itself.¹⁰ In fact, it is "reality" itself which leads the servant into error; small wonder that letters, linguistic representations of this "reality," have the capacity to be far more infelicitous.

Perhaps the text is Rousseau's mimesis of the immanently impossible act of mimesis—his portrayal of the impossibility of absolute referential knowledge which mankind so desperately seeks yet forever must do without. Rousseau's text is a reminder of the illusory nature of meaning, a fictional parallel to his theories of the inadequacy of language to represent truth. Nothing we say is ever true, because of the fact that we say it, but we cannot deny the reality of the effects of our lies. Communication is always imperfect; in this regard, we can align Rousseau not only with Plato and Horace, but with another master of rhetoric: Nietzsche, for whom all truth is illusion, and language—specifically the catachrestic, appropriative language of Julie and St. Preux—is in fact a metaphor, although we have forgotten that it is a metaphor.

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Notes

¹ All references to *Julie ou la Nouvelle Héloïse* are to J. J. Rousseau, *Oeuvres Complètes*, edited by Bernard Gagnebin and Marcel Raymond (Paris: Gallimard [Bibliothèque de la Pléiade], 1964), vol. 2.

² In the *Phaedrus*, Plato has Socrates define the art and practice of good rhetoric: before proceeding with an argument, one must define one's terms, especially "disputed terms" such as love, and proceed to "bring a dispersed plurality under a single form, seeing it all together: the purpose being to define so-and-so, and thus to make plain whatever may be chosen as the topic of exposition" (511).

³ Horace describes nonmimetic art to be "quite like such pictures would be a book, whose idle fancies shall be shaped like a sick man's dreams, so that neither head nor foot can be assigned to a single shape"

(451). Horace seems also to have been influenced by the *Phaedrus*, however; Socrates speaks, in an ironic tone, of how he leaves inquiry about "centaurs and the Chimera, not to mention a whole host of such creatures, Gorgons and Pegasuses and countless other remarkable monsters of legend" to others, so that he can concentrate on knowing himself (*Phaedrus* 478).

⁴ Which is why Socrates emphasizes the rhetoric of dialectic, which does not assume readability, but defines it before proceeding.

⁵ An important point to consider is that perhaps the problem lies in de Man's definition of a text: "the paradigm for all texts consists of a figure (or a system of figures) and its deconstruction" (205). But if all texts are not figural? This definition of textuality is intrinsically bound by Rousseau's thinking about language, which de Man brilliantly examines in his chapter on metaphor.

⁶ Julie, in an attempt at a performative statement, says to St. Preux after her marriage to Wolmar "Oublions tout le reste et soyez l'amant de mon âme" (364).

⁷ In de Man's words, "... the grammatical model ... becomes rhetorical not when we have, on the one hand, a literal meaning and on the other hand a figural meaning, but when it is impossible to decide which of the two meanings (that can be entirely incompatible) prevails" (10).

⁸ In this sense, then, de Man's reading is entirely accurate, and quite profound. The plot of the novel is based on the referential moment *par excellence*, one which points up the arbitrary and self-referential nature of not simply narrative language, but any language.

⁹ Notable exceptions being the episode of Julie's gift, which St. Preux attempts to turn into a "point d'honneur," and the suicide defense.

¹⁰ In a note to Letter 11 of Part Four, Rousseau emphasizes the performative of St. Preux's dream of Julie's death in Letter Nine of Part Five: "L'événement [the death of Julie] n'est pas prédit parce qu'il arrivera, mais il arrive parce qu'il a été prédit" (737).

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The Contextualized Body: Narrative Event in *La religieuse*

Heather Howard

Ecrire c'est produire une marque qui constituera une sorte de machine à son tour productrice ... de se donner à lire et à réécrire.

(Derrida 376)

... je ne connais de véritables religieuses qui sont retenues ici par leur goût pour la retraite, et qui y resteraient quand elles n'auraient autour d'elles ni grilles, ni murailles qui les retinssent.

(*La religieuse* 287)

La clôture is an enclosure which delineates and marks out a defined, limited spatial configuration within its protective walls. It is also an obstacle to the transgression of these boundaries which effectively bars the passage of travel from exterior to interior or vice versa. The monastery or convent can be seen to participate in the notion of the *clôture*: a space constituting an entire religious community behind the walls which separate it from the secular world. The *clôture* is inseparable from the essence of the convent in both structure and function. The architectural integrity of the convent, its structural planning and layout, can be conceived as what Michel de Certeau describes as a *place* or *lieu*: "A place is ... an instantaneous configuration of positions. It implies an indication of stability" (*Practices* 117). Once the construction of the *place* is completed, it is the interaction of the mobile elements within it that construct actual *space*. De Certeau explains that the geometrical *place* of a street is thus transformed into *space* through the "pedestrian speech acts" of the walkers which fill it: "*space is a practiced place*" (117; emphasis added). In theory, religious ideology prevents the establishment of creative, individual trajectories within the convent through spatial and temporal coercion. Although the history of the convent's actualization extends from the Middle Ages to the present, it is in a sense a utopian community which has yet to be realized.

What is the effect on the individual body of prolonged confinement within the walls of the convent? Although the convent

may have a blueprint for its general structure, how is the convent space deployed and ordered in specific cases? And most importantly, what happens to this tightly organized space when an element of disorder is introduced into a narrative structure which replicates the space of the convent structure? These questions are explored in depth in *La religieuse*, the story of a nun, Suzanne Simonin, who challenges the religious and legal system in an attempt to find freedom. Rather than feeling part of the community that has been constructed behind the convent walls, Suzanne feels that she has been locked away from the outside society: "... le couvent en est une [prison] pour moi mille fois plus affreuse que celle qui renferment les malfaiteurs..." (289). Suzanne's status as an illegitimate child has led to her parents' decision to place her in a convent. She is therefore doubly an unassimiliable element in an environment which attempts to normalize individual characteristics: both in terms of her own rejection of the religious community and because she is born of sin.

Within the context of the memoir novel, the disruption Suzanne causes in the spatial configuration of the convent is reflected in disjunctions on the narrative level. Narrative and physical space can be seen as co-existing or intersecting temporally within the diegesis: although Suzanne recounts the story from an extradiegetic and retrospective position, she continually "forgets" or denies knowledge of events she should now understand. We will see that it is in fact her body which bears marks or traces of her experiences and which replays them. In this way, Suzanne physically re-experiences the peripetia of her own diegesis, her body becoming the site of what I will describe as the "narrative event."

The complex narrative structure of *La religieuse* reflects the disjointed creation of the novel. The story of Suzanne Simonin was inspired by a true-life nun, Marguerite Delamarre, who pursued the revocation of her vows. The tale was transferred to a fictional space when Diderot and several friends decided to "create" the character of Suzanne in order to arouse the compassion of their friend, the Marquis de Croismare, and convince him to return to Paris from his isolated country retreat. Having escaped the convent, the (fictional) nun began writing to the Marquis de Croismare, requesting his aid in finding her a position somewhere as a servant. Thus, a short-term correspondence was established, mediated by a Mme Madin, a real-life woman with whom Suzanne was to have

been lodged. When the Marquis attempted to make direct contact with Mme Madin (who knew nothing of the plot), Diderot and friends quickly decided to announce Suzanne's demise. The Marquis later learned the truth of the confabulation and was greatly amused that the wool had been pulled over his eyes so successfully.

Thus begins the creation of a complicated web of narrative voices. The letters between the Marquis and Suzanne make up only a small portion of the book and are included in the notorious "Préface-Annexe." Once Suzanne is deemed too ill to write, it is Mme Madin's fictional voice who continues the correspondence with de Croismare, thereby describing Suzanne's writing of her memoirs and her eventual death. The plot is explained by Grimm, one of Diderot's cohorts in the scheme. The central portion of the book is composed of Suzanne's memoirs which explain the series of events which lead up to and include her escape from the convent. Ironically, although she has found her freedom, Suzanne is able to speak only of her experiences *within* the convent walls before her voice is silenced.

Suzanne's escape provides her with the (narrative) space to describe her experiences within the convent: a community hardly conducive to writing one's autobiography. Regardless of narrative perspective, the main section of the novel can be seen as coexisting with the space of the convent. In this sense, the narrative is also restrictive and creates its own limits in relation to the "outside." While writing about her memories of life as a nun, Suzanne is obliged to re-enter the diegetic world physically.

An important narrative aspect of Suzanne's memoirs is her direct correspondence with the Marquis de Croismare. Throughout she frequently makes asides to her benefactor which emphasize her innocence and purity of nature: "... j'atteste Dieu que mon coeur est innocent, et qu'il n'y eut jamais aucun sentiment honteux" (286). The denial of knowledge which she should possess in an extradiegetic narrative position reinforces this aspect of innocence. If she refuses to understand the full implications of her illegitimate birth (or her lesbian encounter), she somehow remains untainted by them. This phenomenon is a form of paralipsis where the narrator identifies fully with the former self, therefore renouncing all temporal and cognitive privileges of the extradiegetic narrative position (Edmiston 136). The moments of temporal displacement within the narrative structure are thus ones where narrator and

diegetic heroine become one, within an "eternal present" where "... Suzanne seems to regard herself as a symbol of monastic repression, achronic and ageless" (Edmiston 140).

Narrative and convent space are coextensively temporal since a distortion of linearly progressive or evolving time takes place within both of them. Having broken with the outside world in the ceremony of the taking of vows where the nun becomes the bride of God and is for the last time "dressed for the occasion," the nun enters a space bereft of the temporal markers that clutter the life of someone in the secular world: birthdays, childbearing, wedding anniversaries and other cultural celebrations. Certainly days are organized on the basis of a strict timetable, yet religious holidays are experienced without variation from year to year. The only real occurrence within the nun's life is her ultimate corporal death and unity with God, for which her life on earth is only a long stage of spiritual training and preparation.

In requiring the vow of chastity, the convent thus denies the woman's sexual and reproductive capacities. Julien Dominique describes the convent as "*un lieu d'une enfance artificielle et permanente*" where the young girl who becomes a nun is never allowed to mature and discover her true physical nature (140). Time is not only prevented from passing, it is also repressed. This movement is mirrored by the repression of the young woman's body which appears to regress towards its origin in the womb: "... *le cloître doit demeurer un ventre où l'enfant, monstrueusement, rentre, où l'ordre chronologique et généalogique s'inverse*" (Julien 137).

Despite the repression of what one might call "biological time," Suzanne's experience has also marked her physically. Although Suzanne was never spiritually in accord with monastic life, she is unable to shed the coded gestures which compose a kind of body-language within the religious community: "... *je me suis accoutumée en religion à certaines pratiques que je répète machinalement ... mes étourderies me décèleront, et je serai perdue*" (392). Suzanne's body can only express the "brand" of her convent life. The gestures and small talk necessary to achieve anonymity in normal society have become a foreign language to her.

The body, site of investment of the disciplinary procedures practiced within the convent, is thus "scarred" by its experiences.

Like an automaton, it cannot avoid repeating motions that were themselves learned through rote. In *Discipline and Punish*, Michel Foucault qualifies discipline in the Enlightenment as a method of training the body "by the traces it leaves, in the forms of habit, in behavior" (131). Within the world of the convent, there is a strict economy of gesture related to a rigid program of temporal control: "In the correct use of the body, which makes possible a correct use of time, nothing must remain idle or useless" (Foucault 152). Nuns must be left with no free time to contemplate subjects that might lead them away from the spiritual path. Theirs is a timetable of activities mapped out their day from sunrise to bedtime. Their dress, prayer and limited conversation are all carefully orchestrated to reinforce devotion.

What Foucault calls a "micro-physics" of power or an "anatamo-chronological schema of behavior" is indicative of both a temporal and spatial control of every detail of convent life and the relegation of the individual body to a pre-assigned site (139, 152). The walls which contain and protect the religious community are extended and multiplied within the interior space to prevent any one individual body from coming too close to another and establishing the kind of physical relation that so often arises from promiscuity: "La raison d'être primitive de la clôture se trouve ainsi inversée: ce n'est plus contre les dangers extérieurs qu'elle protège les religieuses, mais contre elles-mêmes, contre les tentations du monde et leur propre désir de liberté" (Reynes 126). Nuns are constantly under the surveillance of others in a hierarchical network to ensure that they do not overstep any boundaries such as breaking an oath of silence or entering another sister's room alone after dark. Despite the imposed constraints on space, the historical convent did not possess the same efficiency as a panoptic structure with its single eye watching over all without being seen. Rather, its gaze was split up between different members of the convent; nuns were encouraged to report on each other if an infraction of the rules was observed. Although the *religieuse* was often alone in silent contemplation or within the space of her cell, she was never truly solitary or isolated.

Through the ensemble of the utilization of spiritual discipline to control time and the enclosed, regimented architecture with its cellular construction to regulate space, a new kind of society or community was created within the convent walls: "... dans

la notion de clôture l'aspect spirituel, par lequel cette clôture délimite une partie de l'espace urbain où les femmes se sont retirées ... et l'aspect matériel, par lequel cette fois-ci elle délimite des terrains et des bâtiments appartenant à la personne morale qu'est la communauté religieuse, se pénètrent et se confondent..." (Olliver 93). The claustral space will later become the model for other institutions (schools, work camps, prisons) designed to produce docile bodies through the serialization of time and the compartmentalization of space. In *Foucault*, Deleuze explains that this is accomplished through the creation of a *diagram*, a mapping out of space where "the multiplicity is reduced and confined to a tight space and ... the imposition of a form of conduct is done by distributing in space, laying out and serializing in time, composing in space-time..." (34) In this way every detail of religious life can be invested with power, and a rigid economy of both time and space can be maintained. Every individual is assigned a *place*, yet there is no *space* for individual dissension or variation.

The creation of Suzanne as an element of discord within both narrative and convent space arises with the discovery of her illegitimate birth. At the beginning of the narrative, in reaction to her father's coldness, Suzanne remarks: "Peut-être mon père avait-il quelque incertitude sur ma naissance ... que sais-je? Mais quand ces soupçons seraient mal fondés, que risquerais-je à vous les confier?" (236). Several pages later she comments: "Tant d'inhumanité, tant d'opiniâtreté de la part de mes parents, ont achevé de me confirmer ce que je soupçonnais de ma naissance" (248). Her mother's "sin" having been revealed, Suzanne becomes an unacceptable member of the family and a threat to its stability.

Simultaneously, this discovery (or its denial) causes a temporal distortion on the narrative level. Through use of the conditional tense, "Mais quand ces soupçons *seraient* mal fondés," Suzanne speaks to the Marquis as though she were still debating the truth of her illegitimacy (236; emphasis added). At the same time, she adds the disclaimer, "que risquerais-je à vous les confier?," emphasizing that her origins have not been revealed nor tainted her character (236). Later, in a conversation with her mother, Suzanne admits that she has been "marked" by her illegitimate birth and should be treated differently: "... je me connais, et il ne me reste qu'à me conduire en conséquence de mon état. Je ne suis plus surprise des distinctions qu'on a mises entre mes sœurs et moi..." (252). Upon

entering the convent, Suzanne bears the scar of a sin that brands her as other, the outsider who does not truly belong in the homogeneous religious community. In Suzanne's first convent, Longchamps, where she undergoes two years of a novitiate, her difference is noticed by the good Mother Superior, Madame de Moni: "... il me semble, quand vous venez, que Dieu se retire et que son esprit se taise..." (260). Having recognized Suzanne's spiritual lack, Mme de Moni begins to challenge her own authority and faith, leading her to bouts of spiritual anguish and finally to her own death, a discrete event which in itself becomes an element of narrative destabilization.

Clearly, Suzanne stands outside of the ritual system represented by the convent; her disruption of the narrative and temporal planes indicates this. Yet an attempt must somehow be made to inscribe her into this system and to make her a functioning part of it. The ceremony of Suzanne's vows is the moment where the body is invested with the marks of a ritual system. During her symbolic "marriage" to God and to the monastic community, Suzanne becomes so distraught that she remarks:

Je fus prêchée bien ou mal, je n'entendis rien: on disposa de moi pendant toute cette matinée qui a été nulle dans ma vie, car je n'en ai jamais connu la durée; je ne sais ni ce que j'ai fait, ni ce que j'ai dit... j'ai prononcé des vœux, mais je n'en ai nulle mémoire, et je me suis trouvée religieuse aussi innocemment que je fus faite chrétienne. (263)

Following the traumatic event, Suzanne falls seriously ill as though she had undergone a surgical procedure. Suzanne retains no conscious memory of the experience; her body, however, has been encoded by the ceremony. This physical memory which overrides the conscious memory is what facilitates her initiation into the complex system of coded gestures within the convent space. Despite attempts in the second convent to use her attested lack of conscious memory as a tactic, her body nonetheless attests to events which her conscious mind would deny.

De Certeau describes memory as an "originary and secret writing" which leaves "its mark like a kind of overlay on a body." These invisible inscriptions are "recalled" to the light of day only through new circumstances (*History* 87). Not unlike the raised dots of Braille which can only be deciphered by the fingers of its blind

readers, the imprint of the traces of the ceremony on Suzanne's body can only be "read" within the space of the convent itself. Outside the convent, the ritualized gestures of the religious life which she repeats so automatically betray her training as a nun and prevent her reintegration into the secular world.

The second convent to which Suzanne is transferred would seem to mimic the physical space of the secular world to a far greater extent than does the first. In the second convent (Arpajon), the first impression given to the reader is one of the loosening or "opening up" of the normal rigidly structured convent space. The Mother Superior holds salon in the parlor, surrounded by her favorites who chat amicably, play music and drink tea or liqueur. The nuns themselves circulate between the individual cells. Doors are often closed by their inhabitants with no gaze of authority to assure the "purity" of any interactions.

However, all change within the convent has been instigated to satisfy the Mother Superior's capricious whims and in no sense reflects a move towards a more "liberated" or "enlightened" larger religious community. The Mother Superior leads the community through a constant series of extremes which leads to chaos: "... aussi l'ordre et le désordre se succédaient-ils dans la maison" (329). As soon as too much indulgence has been given to the senses, the Mother Superior is overwhelmed by religious guilt. She tries to bring her nuns back in line through extreme forms of discipline: "... elle est tantôt familière jusqu'à tutoyer, tantôt impérieuse et fière jusqu'au dédain..." (329).

Diderot's major criticism of the convent as an unnatural form of confinement, as evidenced in *l'Encyclopédie*, resurfaces in the description of the convent of Arpajon. The emphasis on worldly things within the convent—enhancement of the physical appearance through the *toilette*, the Mother's evident taste for luxury foods and alcohol, the socialization between the nuns—all point to an increased focus on the sensual. These changes in convent life are all due to the Mother Superior's repressed sexuality which, in breaking free of its imposed constraints, wreaks havoc within the confines of the convent. As Suzanne (Diderot) comments within her narrative: "Voilà l'effet de la retraite. L'homme est né pour la société; séparez-le, isolez-le, ses idées se désuniront, son caractère se tournera, mille affections ridicules s'élèveront dans son cœur; des pensées extravagantes germeront dans son esprit..." (342). The

playing out of the challenge to the institution of the convent, and therefore to that of the Church itself, takes place through the staging of the Mother Superior's dementia, a necessary result of her lesbianism, or sexual "disease." This textual event, localized in the body of the Mother Superior, is narrated/mediated by the intervention of a male voice of authority: "Man" sets the example, although the space of the drama is a community of women. Suzanne's narrative voice is thus co-opted by that of the Encyclopedic defense against celibacy which, like the voice of the lawyer Manouri, disrupts the space of the convent, bringing the challenge of Enlightenment philosophy into the religious community.¹

Another form of traditionally masculine discourse, that of the Church as incarnated in the figure of Father Lemoine, explains the Mother Superior's illness to Suzanne. The Father tells Suzanne that this woman is possessed by Satan: "... il l'appela indigne, libertine, mauvaise religieuse, femme pernicieuse, âme corrompue; et m'enjoignit, sous peine de péché, de ne me trouver jamais seule avec elle, et de ne souffrir aucune de ses caresses" (367). He adds the disclaimer: "Sans oser m'expliquer avec vous plus clairement, dans la crainte de devenir moi-même le complice de votre indigne supérieure..." (367). Dom Morel, another priest who hears Suzanne's confession and who is more sympathetic to her wish to leave the convent, describes the Mother Superior's condition as "une espèce de folie" or "des affections dérégées" which stem from confinement in the convent (381). However, he also attempts to protect Suzanne by adding: "mais croyez qu'il y a des lumières funestes que vous ne pourriez acquérir sans y perdre" (381). The true nature of the Mother Superior's "affliction" is thus glossed over to maintain Suzanne's ignorance/innocence of any sexual intentions. During her confessions, Suzanne is given the language in which she is to describe the Mother Superior's condition. She is warned that any independence of interpretation would be an admission of her own sexual tendencies and therefore a mortal sin. In this double bind, she is deprived of the narrative power to "remember" the encounters which take place between her and the Mother.

In *The Writing of History*, de Certeau's description of the discourse of the possessed woman can be seen in terms of this double bind. This discourse is in actuality the discourse of *something other* being played out on the scene of the dominant discourse which attempts to normalize it: "Not by chance is the possessed

body essentially female; behind the scenes a relation between masculine discourse and its feminine alteration is acted out" (245). In the space of the convent, that *something other* is female sexuality which has expressed itself through lesbian interaction. Although the church authorities are involved in what de Certeau describes as an "enterprise of denomination" which attempts to reclassify the woman's "deviancy" within the dominant religious discourse as an extreme form of corruption, the Mother Superior offers her body to Suzanne as a vehicle of communication in an attempt to overcome the logic of the double bind. The Mother Superior's interpretation of their sexual encounter is proposed to Suzanne as a kind of "body language" by which the two women can exchange their sensual feelings:

- Et vos sens ne vous disaient rien?
- Je ne sais ce que c'est que le langage des sens...
- ...C'est un langage bien doux; et voudriez-vous le connaître?
- ... que signifie ce langage des sens, sans objet? ... Je n'ai point de désirs, et je n'en veux point chercher que je ne pourrais satisfaire. (351)

At this point, a communication breakdown takes place between the two as Suzanne rejects this language as unreadable. Although she again expresses her ignorance of all things sexual, she gives herself away in admitting the existence of desire and the necessity of its satisfaction. On some level she *must* know the implications of the Mother Superior's sexual innuendos.

In spite of Suzanne's voluntary "amnesia" of the erotic experience, her body bears the traces of her sexual initiation. Since the event has never been translated into the linguistic equivalent: "I experienced an orgasm," the body has no choice but to reiterate the experience, destroying the temporal distance between diegetic and extradiegetic (retrospective) moments. All the while Suzanne continues to deny comprehension of the experience: "Je ne *sais* ce que se *passait* en moi..." combining present and imperfect tenses within the same phrase (349; emphasis added).

What at first appears to be temporal disjunction is actually what Deleuze describes as a process of "becoming" where the *event* is part of a continuous movement that "places the past in a present portending the future" (Fold 78). In this way the individual moment

cannot be separated from a temporal river which causes each narrative event to take part in "in the becoming of another event and the subject of its own becoming" (*Fold* 78). Suzanne's attempt to define or separate her sexual experience from the temporal flux which surrounds it results in a perception of *something else*, an event which remains untranslatable:

... je m'interrogeai sur ce qui *s'était passé* entre la supérieure et moi, je m'examinai; je crus *entrevoir* en examinant encore ... mais c'étaient des idées si vagues, si folles, si ridicules, que je les rejetai loin de moi. Le résultat de mes réflexions, c'est que c'était peut-être une maladie à laquelle elle était sujette ... et que je la prendrais aussi. (347; emphasis added)

The event also comes from *somewhere else*. As de Certeau explains, "... an 'art' of memory develops an aptitude for always being in the other's place without possessing it..." (*Practice* 87). Suzanne's narrative position is thus rendered doubly *other*: The event must be described in a discourse which is not her own (that of the Church), while the traces of the event can never fully recreate possession of the original *place* of its manifestation. The result of this phenomenon is a *mise en question* of the authority and stability of the feminine narrative voice.

Julien describes this combination of revelation and concealment and the temporal distortion it creates as follows: "L'hystérie temporelle qui contamine le récit sous la signe de la simultanéité: en même temps obéir et désobéir, en même temps savoir et ignorer, en même temps être séductrice et chaste..." (147). The simultaneous coexistence of these elements within the text reflects the nature of the narrative event itself which is always in a stage of "happening." The temporal insanity of the text is the past and future brought together in the "eternal present" of the convent where all temporal markers are erased and the linear progression of time gives way to a space in which nothing actually ever *happens*. The incident is thus a *non-event* evidenced only by the traces it leaves on the heroine's body. These marks, once reiterated and even in the face of their repression, assure the continuity of the event in time through its reproduction. This movement is not dissimilar to the increased attention that convent life focuses on the body in its attempt to stifle all sensual desire.

The gap which exists between the woman's utterance and the dominant discourse of the Church is first given an opportunity for recuperation in the sensual language by which the Mother Superior attempts to communicate with Suzanne. Although this language is rejected as a foreign one by the heroine, she too participates in a linguistic game similar to that of the Mother Superior. Suzanne's decision to revoke her vows causes her to be labelled as "possessed" in the first convent. Although her challenge to the order of the convent is taken up by Manouri who defends Suzanne, her very presence within the convent becomes a source of disorder. The freedom which remains to Suzanne in the fixed "place" of the convent is her mobility: the capacity to create a "pedestrian speech act" which becomes a "spatial acting out of place" (*Practice* 98). The other nuns and the Mother Superior within the first convent focus their energies on attempting to subvert the individual trajectory which Suzanne creates within the convent. When she passes through a hallway the other nuns step aside as though she were contagious. They also strew glass on the corridor floors to obstruct her passage. She is eventually imprisoned. All attempts to restore order within the convent are in themselves forms of spatial reorganization, or alterations in spatial structure. Although the infrastructure of the convent remains intact, Suzanne has effected a cautious pirouette, a slight variation, in its punctual disciplinary efficiency.²

De Certeau emphasizes the change of locus, or the "slipping from place to place" in the discourse of the possessed woman in comparison to the stable discourse of the exorcist or analyst. Although the Mother Superior (or Suzanne) has no choice but to use the dominant discourse when she speaks, she "inserts her silence into the system that she 'disquiets' and which nevertheless allows her to speak" (*Writing* 265). The disorder which Suzanne introduces into the physical space of the convent is translated into the space of the narrative where the body becomes a mobile sign which attests to the existence of *something other*, the existence of the event. The space of the narrative is thus one of a constant interplay of forces where the seeming contradictions of Suzanne's nature are not opposed in a dialectical fashion but are rather projected into space in an endless system of relays.³

According to Jacques Derrida, writing as a trace or a mark must be able to function in the absence of both *destinataire* and *scripteur*. In the face of this absence, the situations of writer and

reader are not so radically different (376). The text of the memoir portion of *La religieuse* is predicated on the future presence of the Marquis as its reader. The larger narrative strategy is actually a persuasive one: Suzanne must recount her story in a such a way as to move the Marquis to pity, while presenting herself as the kind of person that he would want to make part of his household as domestic help. Ironically, however, by the time the Marquis actually has the manuscript in his hands, Suzanne has died due to injuries from her escape and the manuscript will have outlived its original purpose. The reader inherits Suzanne's memoirs and its accompanying "Préface-Annexe" inscribed with this double absence of both original reader and writer. We are witness not only to the evolution of the larger scheme of Diderot and his friends to fool the Marquis, but also to the textual game-playing—the space-time event of the *clôture*—that is the narrative.

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Notes

¹ In a famous passage in the novel (310-312), Suzanne begins a speech against the convent which midstream is transformed into Manouri's tirade and his idealistic rhetoric. There is no transition; he has literally taken the words from her mouth (or substituted in his voice).

² See the individual tactic or variation on a given discourse as the variation and modulations found in Diderot's *Jacques le Fataliste*. In the Derridian sense, terms are put "sous rature"—"used over" in a different capacity while retaining the original terminology.

³ One can imagine the narrative of *La religieuse* as a hypertext where cybernetic space becomes the stage for the individual trajectory which somehow always refuses to be restrained within a given structure in the assertion of its deviancy.

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Destabilized Security in Mérimée's Short Stories

Marianne Seidler-Golding

Violence in literature is not only found in the depiction of anger, blood, and death but also in less obvious areas of the text. And if it is true that there is a great deal of explicit violence in Mérimée's short stories, there is also, in a rather subtle way, an implicit type of violence derived not from the actions in the text but from the way in which the actions are depicted. The implicit and explicit violence in Mérimée's tales are complementary and necessary.

Theophil Spoerri remarks that "all his tales reek of blood and, at the decisive moment, reach their outcome in death." He goes on to say that "even when in later stories ... he diverted the conclusion to a happy ending ... a nightmarish atmosphere still remains ... primitive passion, the vendetta, the sadism of the werewolf, gypsy loves and gypsy hates, belied in fatality—these are the driving urges in the best tales" (8). Spoerri refers to the violence of the events represented that belongs to the action of the story and that will be referred to as diegetic to distinguish it from another type that is a result of narrative strategy, if not the strategy itself, and that Ross Chambers calls narrative violence. Indeed, no matter how atrocious some of the events told in Mérimée's work, it seems that it is not the violence of the actions and characters of his short stories alone that creates the atmosphere of his work, but also the violence embedded in the narrative itself.

Ross Chambers's article "Violence du récit: Boccace, Mérimée, Cortazar" discusses the violence born from having to sacrifice one of the two interpretations suggested in *The Venus of Ille*, when making one's final choice as reader. He mentions only one of the possible ways a text can assault his reader and does so using René Girard's analysis of violence and sacrifice. Though Chambers is right in comparing narrative violence to the violence discussed by Girard, he doesn't comment on the most relevant comparisons pertaining to the notion of positive and negative violence, the former being that which brings peace by putting an end to violence, and the latter that which propagates violence, generally through

acts of revenge. The notion of positive and negative violence will be analyzed in the last part of this paper.

There can be no textual violence, whether diegetic or narrative, if it is not perceived as such by the reader. Wolfgang Iser has dedicated most of his work to reader response, and he has developed a strong theory about what it is that makes the reader react. His analysis authorizes the concluding statements on the effects of narrative violence found in this article. Chambers's very broad definition of narrative violence will serve as a starting point for this study: he describes it as "the way in which a narration imposes itself" (159-60). The key word is "impose." Whether it is supposed to emphasize the notion of text as a compulsory application or as something made to prevail by force, as some dictionary definitions suggest, the same idea exists in both cases that the text is being forced upon the reader. It must be added that narrative violence is characterized by its ability to make the reader uncomfortable, to violate his/her expectations toward the text. In short, narrative violence is destabilized security.

The reader's sense of security can be destabilized in more than one way. When the language used to write a tale doesn't correspond to the situation being depicted, or when the reader's reaction to what is being told diverges drastically from that of the characters involved, the reader feels assaulted, unsatisfied, off balance. What better illustration of this phenomenon than *Mateo Falcone*? It is the story of a young boy of ten, Fortunato, who soils his father's name by betraying a man in exchange for a gold watch. Mateo, the father, learning of his son's betrayal, picks up his gun and takes Fortunato to a ravine where the ground is soft and easy to dig:

Mateo loaded his rifle and took aim.

"May god forgive you! he said.

The boy made a frantic effort to get up and clasp his father's knees, but he had no time.

Mateo fired, and Fortunato fell stone dead.

Without throwing a single glance at the body, Mateo went back to his house to fetch a spade with which to bury his son. He had only returned a little way along the path when he met Giuseppa (his wife), who had run out alarmed by the sound of firing.

"What have you done?" she cried.

"Justice!"

"Where is he?"

"In the ravine; I'm going to bury him. He died a Christian. I shall have mass sung for him. Let someone tell my son-in-law Tiodoro Bianchi to come and live with us."
(24)

These are the story's concluding words.

It is difficult not to be appalled by the coldness with which Mateo executes his son and immediately thereafter arranges his replacement in the Falcone home by another male, one of his sons-in-law. It is also difficult not to be horrified by the gap between the atrocity of the events taking place and the manner in which they are told. That gap leads to another: one that separates the way Mateo seems to feel from the way the reader feels. The reader expects a somewhat different reaction from the father, which would translate into a more sensitive account of the facts by the narrator. The narrator, however, shows no more emotion than Mateo. James F. Hamilton has noticed that:

The usual reaction of shock and horror clashes with the refusal of emotion by Mateo following the execution of his son, Fortunato, at the end of the story. This disparity creates a malaise on the part of the contemporary reader. (52)

But what is it that enables us to expect a certain tone or a certain language, a tone or language that differs from that found in the text? And what makes us react and think: this tone or this language is not appropriate for the situation? What is it that makes us feel assaulted by the text? Wolfgang Iser, one of the founders of Reader Response Criticism, has argued that:

... expectations arise from the fact that the reader has a repertoire of familiar literary patterns and recurrent literary themes, together with familiar social and historical contexts. Technique and strategies are used to set the familiar against the unfamiliar. (288)

In our example, the father's lack of emotion goes against our social and emotional expectations and background.

Though not brought up by Chambers, this type of violence is also narrative. Narrative violence is provoked, in this text, by the imposition of an unsettling ending and of an uncanny behavior. The colder the father's reaction, the warmer and deeper the reader's

sympathy for the child. The reader is assaulted in his sensitivity by the text and fights back by taking sides with the boy. But to no avail. The text imposes itself on the reader and offers him no choice of accepting or rejecting the situation, and even less of a choice as to whether he might have misunderstood what actually took place. Indeed, both the situation and the language that express it are very clear and leave no room for doubt. Rereading the text only verifies that assertion rather than help find new elements that might somewhat soften the blow. Both the situation and the language are like shots fired at the reader, just as Mateo fires shots at anyone who gets in his way (one might recall that before shooting his son, he had killed a man who had hopes of marrying Giuseppa). The language used is sharp, concise and direct.

While *Mateo Falcone* assaults its reader with its blow-like and unsettling nature, quite the opposite is true of the *The Venus of Ille* whose theme, one could go so far as to say, is precisely indeterminacy—to use Roman Ingarden's expression—or undecidability. Indeterminacy in literature stems from the fact that literary texts "cannot be fully identified either with the real objects of the outside world or with the experiences of the reader" (Iser 9). From this definition of indeterminacy, it is obvious that all texts are subject to it. However, some texts play with the notion more than do others. Where *Mateo Falcone* leaves no room for interpretive doubt, *The Venus of Ille* does all in its power to maintain a feeling of uncertainty by offering not one, but several meanings to its story. One might think that having a choice as to how to create a story would purge any kind of violence from the text. But an analysis of *The Venus of Ille* will show that this is not necessarily the case.

Alphonse is to wed a rich and beautiful young woman. On his wedding day, the young man comes to the rescue of the villagers, who are involved in game of *pelota* against a team of mule drivers from out of town. In order to perform at his best, he takes off the ring destined for his fiancée and places it on the finger of a bronze Venus discovered on his father's property. After the game, he attempts to retrieve it from the Venus's finger but finds that he cannot. On the day following the vows of the young woman and Alphonse, the groom is found crushed to death in his bed; the ring is on the floor by his side.

At no point in the story is it explicitly stated that the Venus committed the murder of young Alphonse, and yet at the same

time, it is suggested every time an allusion is made to the Venus's human traits or behavior. The great quality of *The Venus of Ille* is its use of indecidability, the way it presents multifaceted events. For every situation, the text offers both a rational and a supernatural explanation, creating doubt in the reader's mind as to what he or she should actually believe.¹ This doubt is present throughout the text. We are first made aware of it when the narrator, an archeologist from Paris, and his host, Alphonse's father, cannot agree on the significance of the Latin inscription found on the Venus (CAVE AMANTEM). These words can mean one of two things: either "beware of him who loves thee, mistrust thy lovers" or "beware if she loves thee."

The plurality of meaning leads to a linguistic battle, the importance of which is not apparent until the end of the tale, with Alphonse's death that can be seen as occupying simultaneously two strategic loci in the mystery to be untangled: it can serve as the solution to the linguistic battle and mystery if one believes that the statue is the culprit, for in that case, it is clear which of the two interpretations is the valid one: "beware if she loves you." In the second case, Alphonse's death is the root of the mystery, rather than its solution, for if the statue is not held responsible for the crime, another culprit must be found (whether it be the Spaniard or someone else), and the linguistic indecision becomes an issue of no importance at all. The readers who favor the first interpretation, that which favors the statue's guilt, will also, in every event depicted, pick the supernatural explanation over the rational, as does the Parisian narrator.

The opening scene describes the discovery of the statue by Jean Coll, a workman employed by M. de Peyrehorade. This event is told by the guide who is driving the protagonist from the train station where he has met him to the home of Monsieur de Peyrehorade. The guide explains that Jean Coll found the Venus as he was digging in the ground. Jean Coll accidentally hit it with a pickax. As a result, the statue fell on the man and broke his leg. One can read what happened as an accident, or one may see it as the purposeful revenge of Venus. A few pages further, the rock that a young rascal had thrown at the Venus is flung back with full force in the boy's face. This can be explained as a simple ricochet, or can be recognized as the vengeful action of the statue. A feeling of uncertainty emerges for the third time as Alphonse tells the Pari-

sian that the ring on the statue's finger cannot be removed. Is it the Venus's doing, or is it simply the way the fingers of the statue are bent? It is written in the story that "... her right hand ... was bent, with the palm inward, the thumb and two fingers extended, whilst the others were slightly curved" (240). The narrator, whom the ring incident has left unsure and uneasy, recalls how drunk Alphonse was when he tried to take the ring back. He had also remarked on the size of Alphonse's hands, which would suggest their possible clumsiness. And so, in finding a perfectly rational explanation for Alphonse's inability to retrieve the ring, he reassures himself and forgets about the incident—temporarily, at any rate. But he is reminded of it the next morning, when the body of the groom is found lifeless in his bedroom, with the ring on the floor by his bedside.

Suspicion falls immediately on the Spaniard who was at the head of the losing team in the game of *pelota*, for he had good reason to resent Alphonse for his arrogance after his victory. The narrator "would have preferred M. Alphonse to be more modest" and he describes the Spaniard's reaction in these terms: "The Spanish giant felt the insult keenly; I saw him go pale under his tanned skin. He looked miserably at his racket and ground his teeth; then, in a choking voice he said: 'Me lo pagaras.'" ('You will pay me for it'). However, no sufficient proof can be found to arrest him, especially as he has an excellent alibi: "[T]he innkeeper with whom he lodged averred that he had spent the whole of that night in rubbing and doctoring one of his sick mules" (273). Nonetheless, the suspicion that had fallen on the Spaniard may have been dismissed too easily, for, as Anthony E. Pilkington remarks, the reasons for which he is released are not necessarily valid, or even satisfactory:

The Spaniard who falls under suspicion is disculpated at least by the fact that his shoes are larger than the footprints. The narrator in reporting this fails to connect the difference in size with his own earlier observation that the heavy rain had so soaked the earth that it could not have possibly preserved a clear imprint of a footmark. The implication which arises when the reader connects the two facts, as the narrator fails to, would be that the effect of the heavy rain would make any footprints smaller by blurring their outline in the wet ground. (28)

In the same way, Pilkington plays the devil's advocate when he analyzes the statement of the young widow after her husband's death:

It is reported that she saw her husband 'in the arms of a green-looking giant who was strangling him with all his might' and that she recognized in this figure the bronze Venus. Her description of what she saw immediately suggests to the reader ... the narrator's earlier description of the Spaniard defeated at pelota by Alphonse: a 'Spanish giant' striking in that 'his olive skin was almost as deep a tint as the bronze of the Venus'. (ibid.)

What matters is not to rule in one way or another but to recognize the possibility, everywhere present in *The Venus of Ille*, of a double reading. Each episode offers two options: that of the rational, and that of the supernatural.

It is Chambers's argument that choosing one of the interpretations results from an act of exclusion: one must reject one version when choosing the other. This act of exclusion is one of the reasons that such a strong word as violence is more appropriate in the context of narrative strategies than might appear at first glance. Ross Chambers's use of the expression "narrative violence" can be associated with the idea of sacrifice as defined by René Girard. Referring to a thematic sacrifice (that which chooses one theme or interpretation over another), Chambers writes that, following Girard's teaching, one can see the denouncing trace of an exclusionary violence which constitutes the text (160). He thus creates a parallelism between narrative violence and represented or diegetic violence. Chambers describes performing the act of exclusion as sacrificing the interpretation that has not been chosen.

Chambers's treatment of narrative violence forces us to go back to the idea of real violence analyzed in the works of Girard. Girard observes the existence of two types of violence: one that stems from a state of crisis and is "unjust, illegal, and illegitimate" (*Violence* 23), and the other that is a way of releasing or unburdening what caused it, a violence that Girard calls "holy, legal, and legitimate." He insists that "beneficial violence must be carefully distinguished from harmful violence" (37). Beneficial or positive violence is translated by sacrifice, a pacifying gesture whose object is to prevent the propagation of violence. Only through sacrifice can

the order disrupted by the first act of aggression—the one that makes the sacrifice necessary—be reestablished. Girard attempts, with this explanation, to prove the usefulness and positive qualities of sacrifice.

According to René Girard, negative violence, on the other hand, is that which spreads uncontrollably. The only way to put an end to it is to make a sacrifice. Coming back to our first example, that of *Mateo Falcone*, it must be said that, as horrible as Fortunato's death might appear, it creates a liberating discharge that enables the reestablishment of order. Order is first turned upside down when the child wants the adjutant's watch. That object embodies modernity and the city, which are both in conflict with the maquis and the ancient values (Gans 18). Fortunato's execution is a sacrifice in that its goal is to save the family name and the relationship between Mateo/traditional values and the bandit/traditional values, be it at the risk of breaking communications with the adjutant/city/modernity, all of which are embedded in the watch, symbol of progress and object of envy of a whole modern society. The reestablishment of order does not alleviate the feeling of horror that seizes the reader who experiences intensely the brutal force of the narration.

To speak of a "positive violence" therefore does not imply the existence of a good narrative violence. Is narrative violence's object ever to re-establish a stable situation in a state of crisis? Chambers seems to believe so, since he speaks of the possibility of an exclusionary act performed by the reader at the textual level. If it is indeed true that the reader is given the opportunity to choose between two interpretations, this choice requires an effort on his part; he struggles when confronted with this "narrative powerlessness." In *The Venus of Ille*, the difficulty in choosing or filling in the gaps is felt not only in the conclusion of the story, with the mysterious death of Alphonse, but as we have seen, throughout the text where dualities are continually operating.

There is one flaw, however, in Chambers's analysis: it presupposes the validity of each of the two interpretations, and never brings up a third option that consists of not making a choice between the two, for neither is actually found to be more valid than the other. The genius of *The Venus of Ille* is precisely the fact that it does not allow the reader to choose between the solutions suggested in the text, and for that reason, it enables the reader to

appreciate it more fully. As Roland Barthes states, "to interpret a text is not to give it a meaning (more or less well founded, more or less free), it is on the contrary to appreciate the plural from which it is created" (11, my translation). This does not imply that plurality is reassuring; quite the contrary. It frustrates the reader who does not necessarily accept the possibility of *not* having to choose between the interpretations suggested, of *not* being able to exclude one of the two.

The Venus of Ille does not give us the opportunity to exclude either of its interpretations, for neither can be proven unjustified. Violence might be triggered when one is confronted with a choice to make, but it is also present when that choice is not an option. Although we can be quite comfortable with a text that offers several levels or layers of meaning—the superficial and the deeper levels, for instance, or the comical and the sociological levels—a text that offers meanings that contradict or exclude each other has a drastically different effect on us; our expectations of finding a single conclusion to a text, and therefore a single meaning or several layers of non exclusionary meanings as just discussed, are likely to make us feel frustrated. Chambers, Barthes, and Iser would all agree that there is an uncomfortable feeling associated with the undecidability brought about by some texts. Does that imply that the reader would be more satisfied if the tension due to the narrative could be alleviated and replaced by a more comfortable feeling, one of certainty, one of security? The critics I have just mentioned would most likely agree that the reader would not benefit from such a release of the tension created by the text. Quite the contrary: Iser remarks that the reader's expectations "can be shattered, altered, surpassed or deceived, so the reader is confronted with something unexpected which necessitates readjustment" (Iser 287). But if this happens, the reader gains what H. James called "an enlargement of experience" (qtd. in Iser, 287). Iser sees the reader's frustration as a positive experience, not a detrimental one by any means. Indeed, what could we gain from having our expectations met on a systematic basis? B. Ritchie, whom Iser quotes, reminds us that: "[t]o say merely that 'our expectations are satisfied' is to be guilty of [a] serious ambiguity. ... such a statement seems to deny the obvious fact that much of our enjoyment is derived from surprises, from betrayals of our expectations" (ibid.).

The violence created by the shattering of our expectations—be it a result of language, tone, or plurality of meaning, of inconsistencies, gaps, or unreliability, to name but a few causes of narrative aggression (only two of which we had the space to bring out in this article)—turns out to be a positive violence, in that it forces the reader to react to the text he is reading, and in doing so, to take, along with the author, responsibility for the creation of the text. And so, although the possibility of eliminating tension through sacrifice is nothing but an ephemeral illusion shattered by the constant presence of indeterminacy, and although it is, in the end, only at the diegetic level that order can be restored through sacrifice, the violence found in the narration must not be thought of as negative. Thanks to the narrative violence, the reader is made to take part in the text, even if it only increases his sense of frustration. "It is only the 'safe' text, the 'nice' text which leaves us intact" (Brink 45).

As a conclusion, I would like to suggest that to pick up a work by Mérimée is to voluntarily engage oneself on a path both thorny and unbalancing, and that a (good) reading is perhaps essentially an adventure on which we set off without knowing (or wanting to know) what awaits us.

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Notes

¹ An excellent reading of *The Venus of Ille* by Tobin Siebers can be found in his article entitled "Fantastic Lies: *Lokis* and the Victim of Coincidence." *Kentucky Romance Quarterly* 28 (1981): 87-93.

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Les plis dans les puits: Identity and Narrative in Myriam Warner-Vieyra's *Juletane*

Anne-Lancaster Badders

Juletane by Myriam Warner-Vieyra is a novel about woman's alienation, a struggle against the textual diagrams and the representations imposed on the central characters of Juletane and Héléne. The power structures establish the relative power of the female as wife in Senegalese society according to her access to money, which then determines the type and size of space she may occupy. For both of the central characters, Juletane's journal with its clearly-defined spatial relationships acts as a catalyst. In writing the journal, Juletane begins to author her own existence through questioning "comment suis-je descendue dans ce puits de misère" (18); through reading the journal, Héléne reconstitutes her identity alongside Juletane's.

As the outside reader, we are brought to question cultural assumptions not just in Sénégal, but also in a broader context to which Héléne serves as a link. The destabilizing of the social paradigm occurs not only on a thematic level, but also in Warner-Vieyra's writing. The bifurcation of the speaking voice and the layers of memory create a text with many folds both between the voices and within each of them, a text which deliberately opposes itself to a linear narrative. Consequently, Warner-Vieyra and Juletane are new cartographers of textual space. What of Héléne? She is not the narrating subject of either text, she is only the "destinataire" of Juletane's and the central figure of the middle text. As I will show, the processes of reading and of writing women into texts are interdependent given Juletane's struggle with her interstitial position in society, thereby linking sexual, textual and social space.

Muslim society traditionally defines a woman as daughter, sister, wife and mother; therefore, Juletane is first and foremost Mamadou's second wife. She was briefly the preferred wife, but her intolerance of polygamy coupled with her inability to have children motivated Mamadou to marry yet a third wife who then became the privileged one. Her upbringing in Guadeloupe and her education in Paris did not afford Juletane an adequate understanding of the situation into which she was thrown. Her rank in the family thus fell to the lowest wife; this position determines her

physical space. At four feet by five feet, her room resembles a jail cell. The preestablished geography (de Certeau 122) of Mamadou's house makes the social structures appear repressive to both Juletane and to the reader. The power dynamics within the household are reflected in the diagram of the building shown in bits and pieces throughout the text and in the relative freedom the characters feel moving from one space to another. According to Claudine Herrmann in *Les voleuses de langue*, "l'espace est ... pour la femme, par définition, un lieu de frustration physique, moral et culturel" (150). Juletane maps the power dynamics out through a system of exchange.

Mamadou has access to every room in the house, and thereby addresses all space as public. Each wife fits into the diagram according to her relation to him. Ndèye, the favored wife, moves around freely, but never transgresses what she understands to be the space shared by Mamadou and his other wives. She alone eats with their husband, has her friends over, joins company in the living room, and goes out on Saturday nights. Awa, the mother of his children, sits in the courtyard with them, going into the kitchen only to cook the family meal. Juletane, the barren and crazy wife, spends the majority of her time in her room, alone. When she does transgress the borders—for example when she plays music in the living room—she infuriates Ndèye, who then breaks the records, symbols of Juletane's perceived freedom and youth in Paris.

In her article "Geographies of Pain," Françoise Lionnet suggests:

In this carcereal world, the women's activities as well as their thought processes are controlled and policed by structures of domination that involve complex networks of power vested primarily in the male characters, but at times reinforced by other female characters, such as Juletane's co-wife, Ndèye. (138)

In the frequent absence of the male figure, the authority is displaced onto Ndèye. Almost as payment, she expects money and jewelry from Mamadou, reminding him and the others of her favored position. "Que donne-t-elle en échange?" (36) Nothing. He married her out of vanity, because she was "très courtoise" (ibid.). She knows this and uses it to her advantage. She maintains her author-

ity throughout much of the book, until one day following Awa's death, Mamadou visits Juletane and says:

Ma vie jusqu'ici comblée, c'est la première fois que j'éprouve douloureusement mon impuissance. Je comprends, aujourd'hui, l'étendue du mal que j'ai pu te faire en t'abandonnant à ta misère moral. J'espère qu'un jour, tu me pardonneras. Que puis-je faire pour que tu me pardonnes?
(114)

She tells him to renounce Ndèye, the source of all of his problems. After this moment, Ndèye becomes more subdued, Mamadou having taken into account and acted upon the wise words spoken by the madwoman.

For the most part, Ndèye reinforces the "structures of domination." Upon her arrival at Mamadou's house, she asserts herself by doubly insulting Juletane. She refers to her as "la folle" and as a "toubabesse" (white woman). Openly labeling her as mad automatically silences Juletane's voice and sanctions others to ignore her. "The rantings of a madwoman are irrelevant. Her anger is impotent" (Usher 7). Ndèye's labeling asserts her own position and quells any possible threat her co-wife might pose to the household by "clearly positioning (Juletane) as Other" (ibid. 11). From Ndèye's perspective, Juletane seems strange for not having willingly accepted her role as co-wife. From then on, the gaze serves as a language of discourse between Juletane and her co-wives. Each look acts as an arrow, serving as a link between differently defined social spaces (between Juletane's room and the courtyard, for example).

Ndèye's use of the term "toubabesse" also underscores a process of assimilation which Homi Bhabha calls "Otherness," a term which she contrasts with "Other" (Bhabha 116). Juletane does not fit a simple model of post-colonial space; she is a woman from Guadeloupe educated in Paris and now living in Senegal. Not only does Warner-Vieyra give voice to the otherwise-silenced "Other," she also problematizes the Self/Other opposition by positing an "Otherness," neither Self nor Other, located within the splitting of colonial space. Through the repeated production of difference—what Bhabha also refers to as a double or hybrid vision—the creation of subjectivity in *Juletane* menaces the colonial, Manichean paradigm. Juletane, as part of Mamadou's household, is confronting this splitting of colonial space head-on. Juletane notes that

"jusqu'à ma rencontre avec Mamadou, j'avais donc vécu bien loin de tout écho colonial" (30). Her complete difference within society results, in part, from her Christian beliefs and her western education.

Hence the term "toubabesse"—symbol of Ndèye's attempt to force Juletane's assimilation with the colonizer—angers Juletane because "elle m'enlevait même mon identité nègre":

Mes pères avaient durement payé mon droit à être noire,
fertilisant les terres d'Amérique de leur sang versé et de leur
sueur dans les révoltes désespérées pour que je naisse libre et
fière d'être noire. (79-80)

The double significance of Ndèye's use of "toubabesse" erases Juletane's personal history, both as a black woman and as a woman from Guadeloupe. Juletane considers her "identité nègre" inherent and essential to her being, the erasing of which effaces her physical presence, much like her name which she describes as "gommé sur le registre du temps" (13). The label also raises the problem that while Juletane received an education in Paris, she was not born in France. Despite outside attempts to clearly position Juletane as "Other," she resists through her actions and through her writing. Her writing positions herself at the crossroads of different cultures and different definitions of self.

Awa, fellow wife and mother of Mamadou's children, also reinforces the "structures of domination": "Pour elle, tout l'univers s'arrête à une natte sous un arbre et trois enfants autour" (17). She welcomes Mamadou into her bed and plays the role of the dutiful wife. "Que recevait-elle en échange?" (23) She receives very little, even though she merits more in the Muslim economy of marriage. As the mother of Mamadou's only children, she occupies their space, even in death. Moreover, she keeps the family together, serving as a buffer between Ndèye and Juletane. With the death of Awa and her children, however, the power relations between the wives become uncertain. Ndèye knows that Mamadou will marry someone else, someone younger and prettier who will also give him children. With the destabilization of the norm, Juletane cannot stand being alone in the house with her co-wife, thus accelerating her mental breakdown, albeit at her own hands, since she is in fact the one who poisoned Awa's children.

Juletane alone conceives of personal and private space, a conception which is reinforced by the descriptions of the opening and closing of the *volets* in her tiny room that open up onto the central courtyard. This public space serves as a focal point throughout the journal. Juletane must cross this courtyard to go to the kitchen, to go to the living room, or to take a shower: "Je me reveille en sueur. La chaleur est à son point culminant. Je vais à la fenêtre pour reprendre contact avec la maison" (37-38). She opens herself up for viewing (albeit minimally) when she stands at the window. Only during the early morning hours can Juletane pass from one space to another without being seen, while the public eye, represented by Ndèye and Awa, sleeps. "Ici, la solitude à deux n'existe pas, la famille est là, elle vous entoure, vous distrait, pense à vous, pense pour vous" (62). She seems on display when she writes, but her co-wives ignore her "mad" behavior.

Despite her frustration and the two opportunities presented to her, she doesn't leave; she believes she married Mamadou "for better or for worse." In addition, she has no other family; where would she go? What would be the point of returning to Paris by herself? She has no home. Evelyn O'Callaghan discusses the interdependence between the woman being oppressed and the structures that oppress her which act as "a kind of protective enclosure, calabash or cocoon, made up of layers of assumed roles and evasions, behind which the fragile self hides its vulnerability" (n. 15, 107). Juletane complicitly perpetuates her image as insane since it affords her the space and thus the power to limit and control her exchange with the family.

The opposition of the structures of domination and Juletane's Otherness are further evident in her actions. According to Foucault, madness implies an inability to produce language (*Madness and Civilization*). Juletane rarely speaks within the context of the events of the house, for she speaks French and cannot speak the national language of Sénégal. Her madness manifests itself outwardly in her violent acts which she uses instead of language to communicate her anger and frustration. The least of these acts is the tearing of a sheet into a million pieces, "la tête vide de toute pensée" (38), and throwing them out the window. Her gesture and accompanying laugh disrupt the established order of the courtyard and confuse Awa.

Her characterization as a "madwoman" provides a further key link to her control over self-definition and sexuality. At one point, Juletane is transported back to her island while taking a shower. "C'est la première fois, depuis que je suis ici, que je pense à mon pays d'origine; les souvenirs qui me viennent habituellement sont liés à ma vie en France" (59). Mamadou's loud knocking and use of "folle" extract her from her dream. In response, she opens the door and lets him get a good look at her body, knowing full well what his intentions are (she is still young and attractive). Rather than invite him in, she fills her mouth with water and spits on him, then closes the door. In so doing, she claims control of her sexual space. From her mouth that has no access to language, the symbolic ejaculation signifies her *puissance*. Ever since the loss of her child and the beginning of co-habitation with Awa, and then Ndèye, she maintains her body as a private space, and thus sexually inaccessible to Mamadou.

Juletane begins literally to author her own existence by stealing the notebook of her co-wife's daughter, Diary. In doing so, she appropriates the space of the school child to "disposer d'un support de réflexion" (18). This reflection becomes a site of the production of language, thereby unsilencing the madwoman. She effects an immediacy with the text by using the present tense, distinguishing between the transcription of events of her current condition and those of her past, as if to suggest she is experiencing the former, not writing them down. "La faim m'oblige à laisser un instant mes souvenirs. Je traverse la cour. Awa, assise sur une natte, sous le manguier, trie le riz en compagnie de Diary. Les deux autres enfants se disputent une mangue avec les mouches vertes. Ndèye n'est pas visible" (36). As she problematizes aspects of her life, she thinks and writes. "Je n'avais jamais imaginé que coucher ma peine sur une feuille blanche pouvait m'aider à l'analyser, la dominer et enfin, peut-être, la supporter ou définitivement la refuser" (60). Rather than acting like an automaton, or a cog in the machine of the household, she engages herself while writing, declaring her pain and writing out the thoughts and events that had been buried in the depths of her consciousness.

She self-consciously declares the desire to write, to fill the blank pages of the notebook, thus establishing herself as producer of a text. "J'ai subtilisé un cahier de Diary, la fille aînée d'Awa. C'était la seule façon pour moi de disposer d'un support de réflexion"

(18). The act of writing occupies her and turns the journal into a friend and a confidant. Her *ami*, gendered male, clearly replaces her husband, given Mamadou's lack of concern for her well-being and her idealized notion of a husband: "Il devrait être tout pour moi, moi tout pour lui, notre union aussi solide qu'une forteresse construite sur un rocher" (115). As she reaches the end of the notebook, Juletane amends her intentions: "Je dois achever mon journal, c'est le seul héritage que je lègue à Mamadou. J'espère qu'il le lira et comprendra combien il avait été éloigné de mon rêve" (130). Consequently, she transforms the text from a personal account into an *objet d'échange*. With the dual representation of the journal as object of exchange and as friend, the text becomes Juletane's own Diary, the only child that she could give to Mamadou. The journal would put substance back into her relationship with her husband, as it was when they were in Paris. Given the economy of the household, all marital relations are grounded in an exchange of money and goods for sex.

Mamadou is unwittingly complicitous in the destruction of the family. What had been an exchange of social relations in Paris becomes an empty exchange as Juletane refuses polygamy and becomes unable to have children. The emotional foundation of the family becomes secondary to the materialism, seen especially with Ndèye. Mamadou marries her not only out of vanity, but because within the Muslim economy of marriage he has the right to as many as four wives. This is yet one more occasion where he uses his supposed religious beliefs for personal gain. Juletane writes:

Chez ses parents, je le soupçonne de la même hypocrisie.
Où, tout n'est que façade, le plus important est de paraître
riche, généreux, sobre, bon musulman, franc, bon époux.
Alors qu'on est 'fauché', égoïste, alcoolique, menteur, qu'on
ne se soucie jamais des enfants et des épouses délaissées.
Seule compte la toute dernière, l'écervelée que l'on dit femme
évoluée, que l'on couvre de bijoux. (53)

In Juletane's journal, this fetishism of material wealth is linked to the symptoms of alienation and to the crisis of defining oneself and one's relationship to one's culture. The loss of this connection to self and culture implies a loss of morality, a proverbial refusing of hospitality to strangers, and a permitting of the evil eye/I to catch up with one's life. Mamadou understands this when Awa and the children are dead, only then realizing the pain he has inflicted on

Juletane by ignoring her and her needs. Unfortunately, he dies before the exchange of the journal takes place, although it is questionable whether or not he would have been able to read and interpret accurately her disappointment with him. Her compatriot, H  l  ne, thus becomes the only possible *destinataire*. In that we, the outside reader, are put in the place of H  l  ne when we read Juletane's journal, Warner-Vieyra hopes that we will likewise be sympathetic to Juletane's situation.

Juletane breaks free of social constraints by appearing to be in a trance as she writes. She is *ailleurs*, a place where she does not endure the pressures of the dominant social paradigms, a place where she has power. While Juletane writes from her room overlooking the courtyard, she only vaguely watches what goes on beneath her and instead looks back on her life, both recent and distant. The journal begins: "N  e un vingt-cinq d  cembre, jour d'all  gresse, dans un bourg d'une petite   le de la mer des Cara  bes, j'ai de ce fait   t  e con  ue une nuit de Car  me, dans une p  riode de je  ne et d'abstinence" (12-13). From the outset, the reader senses a fundamental tension in Juletane's identity: her conception during Lent—and the attendant implication that her parents did not respect their religious tenets—is at odds with her birth on a joyous holiday occasion, Christmas. This tension is duplicated in Juletane's description of her own name which is "gomm   sur le registre du temps" (13).

Ironically, Juletane marks the hours with each written entry into her private world, making the passage of time appear long and tedious. The use of the time-date stamp at the head of each journal entry suggests a linear mapping of time, each one announcing a new event that builds upon the previous one. This artificial codification of time structures not only the *cahier* but also her life. However, within each time-lined temporal "continent" linearity is not maintained due to associative jumps in time. Juletane, although obliged to enter each journal entry in a certain order, feels a certain liberation: "Je suis une   pave    la d  rive dans le temps et l'espace" (109). In fact, Juletane's "madness" is what facilitates this extension beyond a linear narrative.

The reader is forced to jump-cut not just between varying temporal layers, but also between various diegetic strata. While Juletane's own journal occupies the narrative center of the book, Warner-Vieyra uses free indirect discourse throughout the length

of the book to help the reader see into the minds of the characters. This complex diegetic framework is most clearly seen inside the journal section where there are three layers. The first layer is the voice of Juletane, author of the journal. The middle layer shows a reader interior to the book, Hélène. Through direct discourse and an all-knowing narrator, we intermittently read Hélène's reactions to the journal and understand how the events inscribed therein relate to her own life. A neutral, extradiegetic narrative voice establishes the outer layer. While Juletane's and Hélène's stories are folded in on each other, thereby decentering the dominant narrative, Warner-Vieyra herself attaches the epilogue in order to bring closure to the journal since Juletane herself cannot. This last "authoritative" text, which also includes an epilogue, is thereby incorporated into the other two levels.

Like the various diegetic layers of the journal, time and geographic location are also split. This is indicated by three typographical islands which separate each temporal continent:

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They represent not just a passing from one voice to another or a jump from the present to the past, but also signify the three geographic places where Juletane has lived: Guadeloupe, Paris and Senegal. Further distinguishing the present of each character, each narrative voice has its own typographical setting. Through the temporal flux used in her journal, Juletane includes many events of the various stages of her life in the journal. Her life is reduced to eighteen days (during two of which she doesn't write at all) and 143 pages. She consequently performs an archeology of self by "letting the silence speak" (see Brandt). Juletane observes:

Après une bonne heure de rêverie, je retrouve la réalité matérielle de mon cahier. Ami et confident. Grâce à lui je découvre que ma vie n'est pas brisée, qu'elle était repliée au-dedans de moi et revient, par grandes vagues écumantes, émousser ma mémoire. (60)

At the end of Warner-Vieyra's work, the reader discovers that Juletane died shortly after completing her journal. She literally had come to the end of the *cahier*, having borrowed a few sheets of paper to finish it. The dual purpose of her writing was to create a friendly

sounding board and to establish a means of communication with her husband. Upon the death of her husband, she comes to terms with her definitive isolation in the world. "Me réveiller dans un autre monde où les fous ne sont pas fous, mais des sages aux regards de justice" (141). Her only hope lies in salvation and an afterlife.

Within the space of Juletane's life, the opening and the closing of the shutters symbolizes each coming to writing. The outside light literally allows her to see clearly, Mamadou having refused to replace the burned-out light bulb in her room. Juletane can close the shutters, thereby demonstrating her power within the diagram of the house, but the perpetual isolation, her self-imposed exile, exacerbates her "unstable" mindset and hence becomes a dual act of defiance and concession:

... closed space can function generally as both a positive and a negative image.... It is a trap which forces a confrontation with self, a confrontation often too painful to endure. It is a prison which is accepted and transformed by an effort of the woman's imagination into a refuge from a reality perceived as intolerable. (Wilson 49)

Does the closed space (both her room and the journal) act as a prison-turned-refuge? To treat the house as a prison reduces and denies the complexity of the power within the household and maintains the identity masks, rather than exploring what might lie underneath them. "Je retournerai m'enfermer dans ma chambre. Cachée derrière mes volets, je pus à *travers les interstices* suivre le déroulement des événements" (98-99, emphasis added). Even when she hides in her room, she can establish a clandestine link with the outside world through the interstices of the shutters. Similarly, through the interstices of her text—the written lines on the page—she communicates her life story. Juletane's act of writing definitively forces an inner confrontation which is perhaps too painful to endure. Her writing may in fact hasten the onset of her medical insanity, as shown in the episode where she throws boiling oil on Ndèye's face in revenge for her broken records.

The window thus becomes the link between social/physical space and private/textual space. In *Herself Beheld*, JeniJoy La Belle defines a window as "a double journey into the world and into herself" (7). Via the window of her *cahier*, Juletane, Hélène and the outside reader voyage through Juletane's past. A need to answer

the question "comment suis-je descendue dans ce puits de misère?" (18) motivates each temporal displacement. She returns to the reality of the present because of hunger, the need for more light to write by, Ndèye's raucous laughter, or a reflection on her life and the process of writing.

According to J. Michael Dash, "what underpins the literary imagination [is] a collective amnesia.... [C]ollective denial, a systematic camouflage, becomes a means of survival" (49) Juletane's writing allows her to resist this denial and, analogously, Warner-Vieyra's writing breaks free of the socially constructed amnesia brought upon the "indigène" by the colonizer and his bipolarizations. Juletane's socially defined powerlessness is found at the very basic point of her name: "mon vrai nom, je ne l'ai jamais connu, il a été gommé sur le registre du temps," suggesting that the root of her suffering lies in an additional injustice. To have a name, but to not know it alludes not only to anonymity but to a universality of her condition. Louky Bersianik takes the idea of collective amnesia one step further. She argues that women suffer from an "amnésie congénitale," a more insidious form of oppression (*Les agénésies* 5). Women need to rediscover their pre-history and rewrite themselves into the past. At the same time, they need to be aware of their current role in maintaining the dis-order. "Et peut on blâmer les Hommes de vous mentir? N'êtes vous pas complices de leurs mensonges, puisque vous avez accepté ce marché de dupes?" (*L'Euguélienne* 312). Juletane's inability to accept her role in this "marché" bewilders Awa. Like the mango tree in the courtyard, Awa spent considerable time helping her co-wife to blossom in her new position, all in vain. As the tree can no longer produce fruit following one spectacular harvest, Juletane no longer functions properly in the society after a brief attempt at assimilation.

Juletane's "assistante sociale," Hélène, offers her a solution to her problems of adjustment: repatriation to France. But with her immediate family dead and her Guadeloupe-Paris-Sénégal life voyage, where is her home? When Hélène returns to Mamadou's house for an answer, Juletane shuts herself up in her room, refusing to speak. Overwhelmed by her casework, Hélène leaves without giving Juletane another thought. Four years later, at the request of another social worker, Hélène returns to the islands to search for any surviving members of Juletane's family. Before the trip and prior to Juletane's death, the social worker gives Juletane's journal

to Hélène as an added motivation for her trip but instead of reading it, she puts it aside.

One day, years later and in need of a short break, Hélène picks up the journal without recognizing it. She discovers an intriguing text that previously "elle croyait ennuyeux" (15). Putting aside her metaphorical "chronomètre" (39), she relaxes, lets her hair down, and reads, despite the late hour. This serves as the opening moment of *Juletane*. Hélène is packing her belongings, by which she defines her space, preparing for the move to her fiancé's house. With a preference for traditionally ordered writing, Hélène begins as a conventional reader, assuming madness and womanhood make for inferior writing. The representations she struggles with in her own life are self-imposed reality buffers, to keep her from feeling pain or sorrow. The narrator describes her as pragmatic; she decides to get married not for love but because she wants a child, knowing that with the spouse she has chosen she will continue to maintain her independence. She even establishes a marriage contract in order to preserve her financial power. The marriage is based on the power of money, much like Mamadou's. Through her reading of Juletane's journal, she authorizes herself to remember her own childhood, when "la journée se passa sans que personne se préoccupât de sa durée" (42), much like the evening of the reading. "A travers les interstices" of Juletane's text, Hélène follows the events of her own life as well as those of Juletane's, compelling the outside reader to do the same.

The similarities between Juletane's and Hélène's situations create a negative *mise en abyme*; they are similar, but the women react differently. Juletane did not have a choice in leaving the islands; Hélène decides to leave after finishing her *baccalauréat*. In another example, as Hélène empathizes with Juletane's pain, she remembers an equally painful experience of young love. Her first fiancé, Hector, with whom she was passionately in love, sent a friend to tell her he had just gotten married to a Frenchwoman whom he had gotten pregnant. He believed it to be the only "honorable" thing to do. She then closes herself off to the world for two days. Afterwards, she tells herself she will never allow a reoccurrence of this with any other man and establishes a block of ice around her heart. Juletane, conversely, never emerges from "le puits de misère" resulting from her husband's deception.

Whiskey and cigarettes punctuate Hélène's text and mark the passage of time. Rather than melting the ice, "le whisky, les cigarettes, les parties folles étaient une façon de s'armer contre la pitié, de faire son travail, sans montrer sa propre sensibilité" (102). The alcohol numbs her to the point of no longer knowing "où elle en était" (85). The arming of herself against her feelings creates a state of "zombification." Rather than emotionally experiencing the moment, she puts up a barrier—symbolized as a block of ice—between herself and the world. Too rooted in the mechanical progression of the future, Hélène denies herself and how she got to where she is today.

The reading of the journal transforms Hélène. The first cigarette signals pleasure, while a later one signifies a change:

Pour la première fois depuis de longues années, elle a sans contrainte cessé de brûler les étapes, de gagner du temps. Lire simplement une histoire vraie. Réfléchir, regarder en arrière, remettre en question son attitude habituelle. Elle découvre aussi qu'elle a une vie bien vide. (102)

She ceases to conceive of her life in a linear pattern, having been "très imprégnée du présent et délibérément tournée vers l'avenir" (39). Time changes shape when she relaxes and allows herself to float in a mixture of past and present, her life and Juletane's. The jumps from Juletane's present to Hélène's are made as the result of an evoked memory. She realizes the emptiness of her life due to her "chronomètre." After a while, "Hélène se sentait emportait comme un fétu de paille au grés du vent; tout son être vibrat" (105). Lévi-Straus's "Leçon d'écriture" or "Le son d'écriture" reminds us that the production of language produces resonance, either in the scratching of the pen or the vibrating of the vocal chords. Hélène's reading of Juletane's text posits itself as her own writing through her thoughts and reactions and by putting aside her "chronomètre." In the end, "le journal de Juletane avait brisé le bloc de glace qui enrobait son coeur" (142) and she cries. In the end alcohol coupled with the reading of the journal cause her to experience a cathartic release.

As Carol Boyce Davies and Elaine Savory Fido point out in their introduction to *Out of the Kumbla: Caribbean Women and Literature*:

The Caribbean woman's text is now being (re)written and in witnessing a literature in the process of becoming, the participating critic can only make tentative statements, mark and observe as she attempts to understand literature *in the process of unfolding*. (2, emphasis added)

I would argue that here "unfolding" means not just emerging, but also Be-ing, defining/existing independent of yet alongside the dominant discourse (Daly 98). Initially, *Juletane* presents itself as a private journal written by a woman, and read by yet another; the change in narrator shown by the switch in typeface. Instead, *Juletane* unfolds as a story of a female's position within the colonial discourse, especially that of the woman writer. Warner-Vieyra's text does not confine her. As a private form of writing, the journal format was one of the first acceptable forms of writing by women, a particularly appropriate place for a revisionist message. In *Writing Beyond the Ending*, Rachel Duplexis states:

When women as a social group question and have the political and legal power to sustain and return to questions of marriage law and divorce, the 'covert' status, and their access to vocation, then the relation of narrative middles to resolutions will destabilize culturally, and novelists will begin to 'write beyond' the romantic ending. (4)

Warner-Vieyra creates four endings: the end of *Juletane's* journal, the end of Hélène's reading, the epilogue that announces the end of *Juletane's* life, and the glossary which, while situated at the end, does little to bring the text to completion. Rather, it serves as a static reference point throughout the production of reading *Juletane*.

Warner-Vieyra's book reminds the reader that women have difficulty writing autobiographies because they are positioned in society as Others, unlike men who have access to the "I" (Felman 14). A woman needs to *become* her story through a dialogue with the Self as Other and at the same time reposition the Self in his/her-story. *Juletane's* rewriting of her life and Hélène's reconstruction of self through the act of reading exemplify this process. "Reading woman becomes a form of autobiography or self-constitution that is finally indistinguishable from writing (woman)" (Jacobus 945).

Unlike Virginia Woolf's model where a woman needs a room of her own and a key to lock the door, Warner-Vieyra's model suggests a duality, an opening up, while at the same time maintaining the issue of privacy in the act of production, a tension between

two opposing definitions that keep the writing faithful to the writer. Juletane and Hélène both sit in their rooms, alone. When someone interior to the story enters their space during the event, they push the person away. Yet as no author writes from a void or *table rase*, complete complicity with the status quo remains undesirable. Lionnet proposes that Warner-Vieyra demonstrates a narrative solution to the problem of political domination ("Inscriptions" 31). This domination resides not just in the oppression of the colonizer by the colonized, but also the domination of women in social, sexual and textual space.

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UCLA French Department

Dissertation Abstracts

Leakthina Chau-Pech Ollier. *Mirror of the Other: The Autobiographical Writing of Marguerite Yourcenar*. (Ph.D. Dissertation: Shuhsi Kao, Chair, UCLA, 1995)

For many critics, Marguerite Yourcenar's writing is representative of the French classical tradition. She epitomizes what feminist critics call a "phallic woman" who has erased all traces of sexual difference and desire by submitting herself to the "law-of-the-father." Although Yourcenar's contribution to French literature cannot be denied, her works truly constitute the "dark continent" in the field of women's and feminist studies, and her name is conspicuously absent from collections of essays dedicated to the problematics and the specificity of women's writing.

This dissertation seeks to explore and demystify this "dark continent." It reevaluates Yourcenar's writing within the general theoretical framework of feminist discourse and intends to challenge the preconceived view of her narrative as being genderless, that is to say, masculine. Yourcenar's narrative, as this study posits, carries the traces of a specifically feminine discourse.

Focusing on her autobiographical trilogy *Le Labyrinthe du monde*, the purpose of this dissertation is threefold: circumscribe Yourcenar's inscription of the self and female subjectivity in her writing; to trace the continuous movement out of the autobiographical and into the fictional writings, and vice-versa, which reveals her attempt to re-present her-self and her desire; and to investigate the problematics of the mother-daughter relationship which constitutes the basis on which her autobiographical writing is founded.

Moreover, my reading of *Le Labyrinthe du monde* represents an effort to contribute to the growing field of studies on women's autobiography. Yourcenar's resistance to gender categorization, combined with the gendered narrative which issues from her autobiographical text, provides further confirmation that one cannot read women's autobiography according to the theoretical encoding of the (masculine) autobiographical tradition.

Hélène Chang. *La vérité du comique*: Les Provinciales, Le Neveu de Rameau et A la recherche du temps perdu. (Ph.D. Dissertation: Stephen D. Warner, Chair, UCLA, 1995)

De même que certains considèrent la littérature comme une préoccupation frivole, de même bien des critiques trouvent le comique dépourvu de sérieux. L'état présent des travaux consacrés au comique est en partie responsable de ce préjugé. Groupement des passages exemplaires sous des dénominations différentes: telle est à peu près l'approche de la plupart des études. Un mouvement de synthèse y fait défaut, ce qui risque d'engendrer un faux concept de comique.

La présente thèse s'inscrit sous le signe du pratique et de la théorie. Elle étudie trois oeuvres qui portent toutes le sceau du comique: *Les Provinciales*, *Le Neveu de Rameau* et *A la recherche du temps perdu*. Pareil choix des textes répond à un double objectif. Il s'agit de mettre au point une théorie du comique à partir des exemples concrets et, ce faisant, de dégager la spécificité comique de chaque écrit. L'essai de Baudelaire, *De l'essence du rire*, sert de point de départ théorique de l'enquête.

Le comique pascalien ou « significatif » est d'ordre moralisateur. S'il tourne en ridicule les jésuites, c'est afin de les faire revenir de leur folie. L'antiphrase, langage par excellence des *Petites lettres*, ne désarçonne pas le lecteur, son message étant clair. *Le Neveu de Rameau*, par contre, s'imprègne d'une ironie problématique. Tout flotte dans un état d'indétermination. Loin d'être moqueur, le rire chez Diderot débouche sur un sentiment de dépaysement. En effet, le comique « absolue » de la *Satyre 2de* est un genre violent. Ses énoncés pluriels basculent la notion du fini, déroutent le « bon sens ». Dans *A la recherche*, ni l'idée morale ni la conscience subjective ne traversent le comique. A l'aide de la comparaison, langage à la fois transparent et poétique, l'écriture proustienne fixe des silhouettes cocasses. Devant les yeux du lecteur apparaît l'essence du comique.

« Significatif », « absolu », transparent: les trois formes de comique reflètent le moi du lecteur tour à tour esprit moqueur, conscience subjective, et regard spirituel. Elles embrassent aussi les visions humaines: classique, moderne et synthétique. Se rapportant ainsi à la vie, le comique jouit de la permanence de la vérité.

Jeffrey Woodbury. *Bernard Lamy's Rhetoric and Perspective: Towards an Interdisciplinary Theory of Interpretation*. (Ph.D. Dissertation: Eric Gans and Malina Stefanovska, Co-Directors, UCLA, 1995)

Bernard Lamy's treatises on rhetoric (*L'Art de parler*, 1675) and on perspective (*Traité de perspective*, 1701) demonstrate the fundamental role which the art of painting plays in discursive and interpretative practices at the time of French classicism. The particularity of Lamy's oeuvre lies in its combination of Cartesian rationalism and Augustinian religious thought. In an attempt to unite reason and faith, theory and practice, Lamy depends on the logical discursivity of texts and the sensual appeal of images for the purposes of interpreting Scripture.

Unlike Descartes, who dismissed rhetoric, Lamy devoted many years to the writing, revision and reorganization of his rhetorical treatise. Whereas his contemporaries made rhetoric a specialized theory of legal and religious discourse, Lamy relegitimizes the general applicability of rhetoric by insisting on its importance for forming any utterance, whether banal or sublime. Lamy demonstrates that the arts of eloquence and painting are not only linked by a correspondence between the painted image and rhetorical figures such as hypotyposis, but painting also provides a model for constructing a persuasive discourse.

Lamy considers his *Traité de perspective* an important component of his interpretation of Scripture. Perspective's role as the fundamental organizing principle of painting is explicitly compared to rhetoric's theoretical role for the art of eloquence. But this relationship between eloquence and painting, rhetoric and perspective is more than a clever comparison; it forms an analogy that suggests a more universal conception of how verbal and visual representations are organized, composed, and received.

Lamy's *Introduction à l'Ecriture Sainte* (1709) exemplifies his attempt to unite rhetoric and perspective for the purposes of interpretation. Through eloquent and pictorial representations of his subject, Lamy seeks to prepare the reader for the multiple difficulties of reading the Bible. The author concretely shuttles between text and image in order to effectively explain and clarify the historical, cultural, and figurative filters which obscure the truth of Holy Scripture.

In conclusion, Lamy's oeuvre testifies to an interdisciplinary approach towards interpretation and representation. By uniting word and image, on the levels of presentation and on the level of their fundamental principles, Lamy demonstrates how the two orders supplement each other so as to surpass their individual limits. His "modern" intuition that persuasive texts have to be made accessible to their readers is a response to the growth of secular civil society in the seventeenth century and prefigures the emergence of bourgeois sensibility in eighteenth century aesthetics.

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